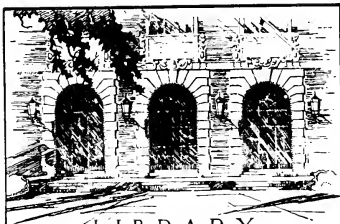




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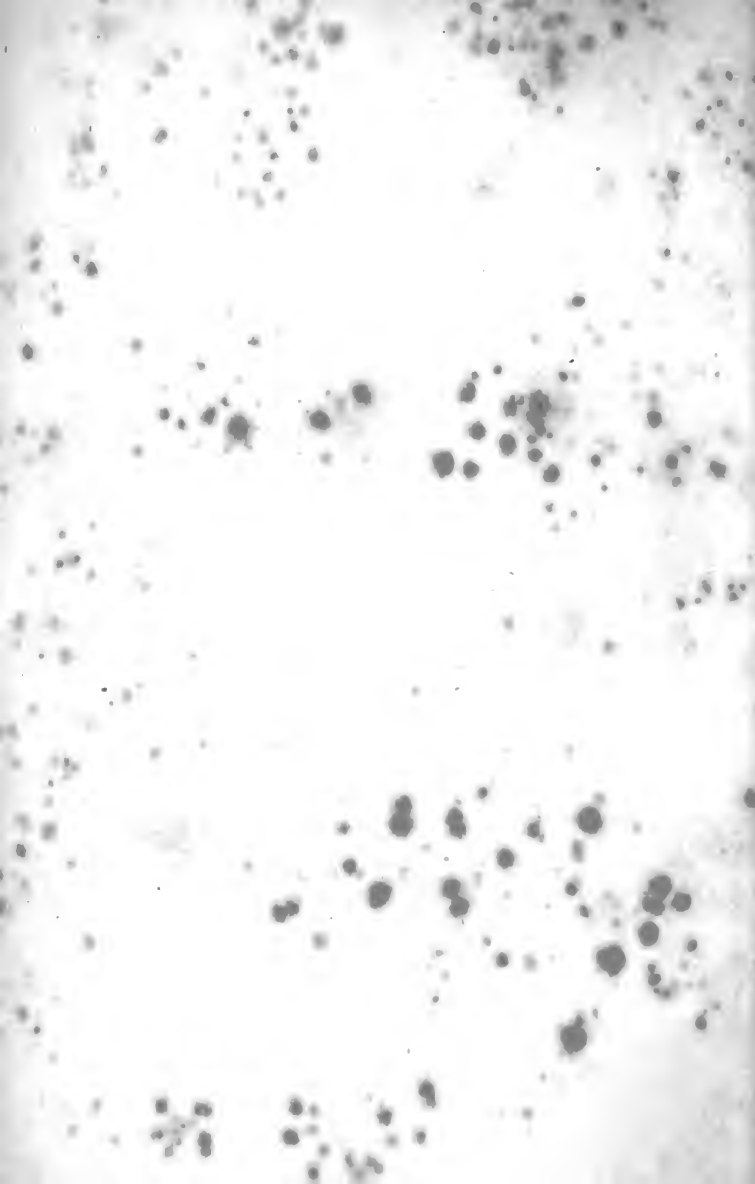
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THE
ROBERTSES
ON
THEIR TRAVELS.

BY
MRS TROLLOPE,
AUTHORESS OF "THE BARNABYS IN AMERICA," "THE ATTRAC-
TIVE MAN," "THE VICAR OF WREXHILL," &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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THE ROBERTSES
ON
THEIR TRAVELS.

CHAPTER I.

THE sort of journey, as to enjoyment, which was now begun, continued and ended, *à la vete-rino*, by our travellers, may very easily be imagined, and for this reason it shall not be described. The great object that the master spirits of the expedition had before them, was the reaching the *imperial city* as speedily as possible. It is vastly probable that they were not the first travellers to whose imaginations this same object acted as a magnet, drawing their bodies after it by a prodigiously powerful attraction; but it may be doubted if the

space between the Duchy of Baden and the city of the Cæsars was ever before passed over with such utter indifference to every thing that lay between, as on the present occasion. As to Bertha, it was a feeling stronger than indifference which caused her to submit not only without a murmur, but with positive satisfaction to this cat-in-a-basket sort of mode of being conveyed over some of the most beautiful and most interesting country in the world. She knew what it was to *look* in the society of the things we call Roberts, and now she knew also what it was to enjoy the happiness, the intense happiness, which "bountiful sweet Heaven" can pour into our hearts, through our eyes, when the spirit is roused up and awakened by the companionship of a friend—a friend like Vincent. So that Bertha, like the rest of the party, very greatly preferred getting on as fast as possible to any lingering on the road.

"Good gracious! how lucky Bertha is!" exclaimed Mrs. Roberts. "How she does sleep, to be sure!" And no wonder she thought her young companion's power of reposing during the fatigue of this long, tedious journey, both enviable and extraordinary, for never did chance bring to the

ear of Bertha the well-known name of some spot, consecrated by history, poetry, or art, without her closing her eyes with resolute firmness, and mentally exclaiming, "Oh! a thousand times rather would I never see it at all than see it with them!"

In this manner they crawled onwards towards Rome, and when at length they passed through the Porta del Popolo, they had at least one feeling that was common to them all, which, though it had but little of classic enthusiasm in it, was at least perfectly unaffected and sincere. It would be difficult to say which of the six persons who occupied the carriage within and without, was the most delighted at feeling that they were about to quit it. This feeling of enjoyment would doubtless have been less unmixed in the fair bosoms of the two Miss Robertses, had they known that almost at the very moment when they were congratulating themselves upon being in Rome, the Lord Lynberry and Mr. Montgomery were in the act of settling themselves very comfortably in private lodgings in Florence. The phrase used by Lord Lynberry respecting the necessity of their "getting on to Rome," had left no doubt on the

minds of the Robertses that they were immediately going to honour that favoured city with their presence ; and as they knew no more than the man in the moon where to apply, in order to ascertain whether they had arrived there or not, they went on hoping and expecting to meet them somehow or somewhere for many and many a tedious day after their arrival. Bertha, indeed, knew where they were as well as they did themselves, having ascertained the way from the hotel to the post-office within a few hours after her arrival, which enabled her, by profiting by her established licence of exit and entrance, to obtain a long letter from her cousin William, informing her of their intention of passing a month or six weeks at Florence. But all and every of the Roberts family would have been as likely to consult an umbrella or a walking-stick upon any point on which they wished for information as Bertha Harrington ; and as she was as little likely to volunteer intelligence as they were to ask for it, they profited not much by Mr. Vincent's accurate details respecting the future movements of his party.

For above a week Mrs. Roberts and her two

daughters did nothing (after getting into private lodgings), nay, they attempted to do nothing save walking about the streets in the hope of meeting their lost friends. But as this did not answer, Agatha, with her usual acuteness of intelligence, suggested the necessity of taking more decisive measures for obtaining the intelligence so important to them.

“Necessary!—to be sure it is necessary,” said her mother, in reply to this very sensible observation; “but you must please to find out, Miss Agatha, the way to set about it.”

“True, ma’am—quite true. We have been to blame in remaining thus long, without taking more effectual measures. I mean to make either my father or Edward go round with me to all the principal hotels. It is a great inconvenience the not being able to speak Italian. But I must make French do. I can bear this suspense no longer. We are wasting our time most deplorably!”

The energetic efforts of Agatha were successful. The civility of a waiter at the second hotel they entered, for the purpose of making inquiries, set them in the right way of obtaining the information for which they long wished, and

before night they had ascertained, beyond the hope of mistake, that no such persons as Lord Lynberry and Mr. Montgomery were in Rome. It was a dreadful blow, but it stunned them only for a few minutes. They happily remembered that the assertion respecting their intention of coming to the imperial city had been positive, but no one recollected having heard them say how long they intended to be *en route*, or what places they intended to visit by the way. They reproached themselves severely for having omitted to ask these interesting particulars, while it was yet time, but drew consolation from the obvious fact that nothing could be more natural than that they should wish to see all that was to be seen.

“In short,” said Agatha, “it is idle folly for us to spend our hours in fretting over what is past. Let us all remember to be more careful for the future. People who wish to pass successfully through life, must never leave themselves ignorant of the movements of friends who are important to them. But though it is well to impress this upon our minds for the future, it is useless to dwell upon it any more now. Let us rather turn our thoughts to the best manner of

employing the interval which may still elapse before we can renew the pleasant *coterie* of Baden-Baden. Perhaps you have forgotten, ma'am, that we have letters of introduction to a Polish lady? She is a relative, I believe, or at any rate an intimate friend, of the Princess Fuskymuskoff; and if she should turn out to be at all the same kind of superior person, and likewise disposed to be civil to us, the having a little leisure to cultivate her acquaintance before the arrival of the friends who will be sure to absorb us, as heretofore, may be, after all our regrets, rather advantageous than otherwise."

"It is very natural that *you* should think so, Agatha. But very unnatural that *I* should," said Maria. "However, of course, I don't mean to object to any effort that may lead to our being restored to the society of our fellow-creatures. The life we have led since we came to this shocking dull place is quite too horrid, and I really do think, that people less high-principled and religious than we are, would be found hanging to their bed-posts after such a week as we have endured. The very fact that we have neither of us unpacked a single smart thing since we arrived,

speaks plainly enough the sort of condition we have been in."

"It does indeed, my dear!" said her mother. "It does indeed speak volumes! You are always the one to give us a helping hand, Agatha, in all difficulties. What is it you propose to do, my dear, respecting this Polish lady? I forget her name. What *is* her name, my dear Agatha?"

"Her name, ma'am, is of little consequence," replied Miss Roberts, with a slight sneer, "for you will never be able to pronounce it. She is called Yabiolporakiosky—the Princess Yabiolporakiosky. Her husband is banished to Siberia, and my dear Siandrina told me she was one of the most charming women in the world."

"Poor dear lady! I dare say if she is so very amiable as the other princess says, we may all of us grow very fond of her, and the more so, of course, because of her high station, and her being so much to be pitied, which always does touch one's heart coming together; but yet, Agatha, I can't but say that just at present it would have been better for us if she had not been in such a very melancholy condition; for Heaven knows, we want something to cheer us just now. However, her

being a princess must be advantageous. What do you mean to do about beginning the acquaintance, my dear ?”

“You need not trouble yourself about that, ma’am. The man you have hired may be at my command, I suppose, for an hour or two ?”

“Certainly, my dear. All day if you want him, except just at dinner time,” replied her mother, with a deep sigh. “I confess I never did feel so dull and miserable in my life. Shall you write, or call, or what, my dear ?”

“I wish you would not trouble yourself about it, ma’am,” replied Agatha. “Depend upon it I will do what is proper, and will tell you the result as soon as I know it myself. Will you let me have a little money, ma’am, in case I should want a carriage ? I have not a farthing.”

“Upon my word, Agatha, I would rather a great deal that you should give me a good box on the ear than ask me for money. There seems to be some wicked charm at work against me about money—for the more I get from your father, and the more I try to save, the more distressed I grow. I really never did see any thing like it !”

“Just as you please, ma’am,” replied her daughter, pushing away from her the pen and ink with which she had been preparing to write. “Just as you please. I don’t think the loss of this new acquaintance will be more felt by me than by the rest of you. I know that poor dear Edward expected a good deal from the introduction, and it certainly would be an advantage when our friends come, that they should see we had some decent acquaintance. However, I don’t care a straw about it. Only I certainly shall not *walk* to make a call upon the princess.”

“Good gracious, mamma, what can you be thinking about!” said Maria, in an accent that seemed to threaten a burst of tears. “Do you really intend, for the sake of saving a few pence, to prevent our making acquaintance with a princess?—and we, too, in such a condition as we are now! Upon my honour, ma’am, it seems as if you had been doing every thing you could think of on purpose to break our hearts! First letting us make the most intimate friendships with the most enchanting set of people in the world, and then tying up your purse and saving sixpence,

in order to make us sit still, twisting our thumbs, without the comfort of a single soul to speak to—and that, too, in the very dirtiest, dullest old town in the world! Oh, dear! oh, dear! how I wish we were at Cheltenham or Brighton!”

“I am sure, Maria, I came to Rome wholly and solely to please you,” returned her mother. “You don’t suppose that I care anything about the curiosities they talk of in this musty fusty old place, do you? And I do think it is too bad turning upon me with reproaches upon its dulness, when we might have lived and died without even being disgusted by the sight of its nasty, dirty, narrow streets, if it had not been for you, and your falling in love with Lord Lynberry.”

“Don’t you, Agatha,” said Maria, turning towards her sister with a face glowing with indignation, “don’t you think mamma is the only mother that ever lived who would speak of what has happened as *my* falling in love with Lord Lynberry, and not his falling in love with me?”

“Mamma is very queer sometimes, certainly; but it is no good wasting our time in talking about it. It is much more to the purpose for me to know at once whether she means for us to make

the acquaintance of the Princess Yabiolporakiosky or not. Will you please, ma'am, to say what is to be done *at once*, without wasting any more time about it?"

"Done? Why you must go to her, Agatha," said the hard-pressed parent, unlocking the work-box in which was deposited all the ready money she had, and taking out a couple of dollars. "There is no help for it now, I see that; but if Maria does not marry Lynberry, and that pretty soon, I begin to suspect that we shall find coming abroad a bad joke."

CHAPTER II.

THE conversation recorded in the last chapter took place immediately after the family breakfast; and before those who had been engaged in it met again at dinner, a great deal of important business had been transacted.

No sooner did Agatha find herself in possession of the two dollars which had been so reluctantly bestowed upon her, and the time of the man-servant at her command, than she rushed into her bed-room, and without another moment's delay began to release the "smart things" whose imprisonment had been so pathetically deplored. Maria had followed her, looking the picture of

sour woe and grumbling discontent ; a condition which she herself described, when asked by her brother what was the matter with her, by saying that she was “only dreadfully out of spirits.”

But, to do her justice, her ill-humour was not of an obstinate character, for no sooner did the various treasures from the at-last-opened travelling trunks greet her eyes, than her features relaxed, and in a very few moments she became as gay and as voluble as ever.

“We must make the best of it, Agatha,” she said, seizing upon a favourite bonnet, and smiling a welcome to her recovered self in the looking-glass. “Fortunately, Lord Lynberry is not the only man in the world; and though, Heaven knows, I am attached to him most passionately, there is no good in crying my eyes out because he has been longer coming from Baden to Rome than we have. On the contrary, I think that the best compliment I can pay him will be taking care to look as handsome as I possibly can when he arrives. And that’s what I will do, you may depend upon it; and I advise you, Agatha, to act upon the same principle with Montgomery. They would think it no compliment, I’m sure, if

we were to greet them with pale cheeks and heavy eyes."

"I thank you for your advice, Maria, though it is not exactly necessary on the present occasion. The man lives not, for whose sake, when absent, my complexion could vary. And yet I can both see and appreciate superiority where I meet with it. These flowers don't look shabby, do they? This *tour de bonnet* is particularly becoming to me; and my first appearance at Rome, in my own character, shall be in my green silk, black lace mantle, and pink bonnet."

"You can't do better," replied Maria, cordially. "You look so like your own dear princess! That is so exactly the way she puts on her beautiful bonnets! And how I do envy you, Agatha, having to dress and make a visit! Would it be quite, quite impossible for me to go too? You need only just say, 'Give me leave, princess, to present my sister to you.' I would promise faithfully not to interrupt your talk by saying a single word. You know I never *do* talk much if there are only ladies. Would it be quite impossible to take me?"

"Absolutely, Maria, so don't think of it. My

dear Siandrina charged me to see her for the first time alone, and, in fact, gave me a very particular message for her that she did not choose to trust in a letter. So you perceive it is impossible."

"Yes, I suppose it is. But will you promise that if she gives parties you will get me asked? Think what it would be to stay at home in an evening with mamma and papa."

"Don't be afraid. You are very pretty, Maria, and I will take care she shall see you. If she gives parties she will be sure to ask you; and I dare say we shall get on very well if we can but screw out money enough for our dress. But I can't stay to talk about it now. I shall write a note to send up with my card; and while I get it ready, do go and tell Stefano to dress himself neatly to go out with me."

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In half an hour afterwards Agatha was driving along the Corso, dressed with great care, and attracting many eyes by the fashionable-looking gaiety of her attire, and the newness as well as the beauty of her face.

As soon as she had left the house, Maria sought

relief from her own very oppressive company by going to her mother's room, where she found her engaged in unpacking a writing-desk, for the sake of examining the addresses of one or two letters of introduction which had been given her at Paris.

“I know, Maria,” she said, “that there are one or two for Italy, but I am afraid that there is not one for this nasty tiresome Rome.”

“Oh! what a blessing it would be if there were!” replied Maria, eagerly. “Open every cover, mamma! Don't overlook any thing, for goodness' sake.”

“You may look too, if you will, child. See, here is Milan one, Florence two, Naples one; but none for Rome. I suppose nobody ever does stay here; it certainly does seem to be the very dullest place in the world.”

“What's that cover directed to you, mamma?” said Maria. “I suppose there must be something in it, or you would not have kept it.”

“It is only an old letter, I believe, from my good friend Mrs. Bretlow at Paris,” replied her mother.

“Let us look at it, at any rate, mamma; that

won't cost money, you know," returned Maria, "and it is just possible that we may find what may be useful. Drowning folks, you know, catch at straws; and considering that we have been a whole week in this dirty old place without having had a single soul to speak to, we may be said to be as badly off in point of society, you know, as drowning people in point of air."

Mrs. Roberts had persevered during the whole of this speech in taking out one by one every paper in her desk with her right hand, while she continued to hold Mrs. Bretlow's letter in her left; and having in this manner completed her unprofitable search, she at length graciously listened to the remonstrance of her daughter, and opened the envelope.

"There!" cried Maria, triumphantly, as not only a note from Mrs. Bretlow, but another neatly folded and sealed appeared within it, "there, ma'am! Rome! I was sure of it. I had quite a presentiment."

"Rome it is, sure enough," returned Mrs. Roberts. "Mrs. Horace Hopperton, Rome. Well, that is a bit of good luck, certainly. Let us see what Mrs. Bretlow says about her. I have

had such a quantity of things to think of, that I had forgotten this letter altogether." Then turning to the epistle of her old acquaintance, she read, "I have enclosed you a letter to Mrs. Horace Hopperton. She has been living at Rome for several years, and, I am told, sees a great deal of company. She is a widow lady, with one son (unmarried), and both he and his mother are very rich. As she is exceedingly good-natured, and very fond of giving balls and having young people about her, I think the introduction may be useful."

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"Was there ever such a piece of luck!" exclaimed Mrs. Roberts, raising her eyes to Heaven in thankfulness.

"Luck indeed! Now I don't care for any thing, mamma," replied Maria. "We have had pretty good success both at Paris and Baden, and who knows what may happen to us here? But for pity's sake waste no time about it. I do think Agatha is very selfish, taking out the man for the whole day, this way. If Stefano was at home, I

don't see any reason why you and I should not dress too, and set out to make a visit to this Mrs. Horace Hopperton directly. I'm sure I'd give the world to get out."

"It would be capital fun, Maria, to be sure," replied her mother, "if you and I could steal a march upon her in this direction, while she is pushing herself forward all alone in another. Where is Edward?"

This question immediately suggested a whole train of hopeful possibilities, and, without waiting to reply to it, Maria rushed from the room and ran up a dark, narrow little staircase which led to that appropriated to her brother. To her extreme satisfaction she found him in it, busily occupied in parting his hair according to a new model which he had just been lucky enough to see in the Piazza de Spagna, where a very elegant looking young man on horseback had taken off his hat to salute a lady who was stopping at the library in a coroneted carriage.

"Never mind me, Edward," said his sister, holding out to him Mrs. Bretlow's letter. "Just read that, will you?"

“The devil! Where did this come from?”

“From mamma’s writing-desk. This may be worth something, Edward, mayn’t it?”

“Worth? Why it may just turn Rome into Paris for us. What upon earth made the old lady keep it so close?”

“She forgot it; but don’t scold about that now. Let us lose no more time about it if we can help it. You know Agatha’s selfish, independent ways. She has made mamma give her two dollars for a carriage, and has taken Stefano with her that she may make her solitary visit in style to her intended Polish friend—the Princess Heaven knows what. She might so very well have taken either you or me with her! But mamma says, and she is quite right, that it would be capital good fun to steal a march upon her here; and we might do it as easily as possible, if you would help us.”

“Help you? I’ll help you fast enough,” replied her brother. “It was a confounded shame for her to set off by herself, considering that we have not a single soul to speak to here. I’ll help you, depend upon it. Where does this promising Mrs. Horace Hopperton live?”

“Ah! that’s the worst of it—the only direction upon the letter is Rome.”

“Never mind that—I know all about finding out people now—if you and the old lady will dress yourselves directly, I will run out and find where she lives, and bring back a carriage to take us. If my mother can shovel out two dollars for Agatha, she can do as much for us, with herself into the bargain, I suppose. Never mind about a footman—the people will never find out. Away with you, Maria—make yourself look as elegant as you possibly can—I shall do, shan’t I?”

“Perfectly, Edward! your hair is divine. Off with you, and we will be ready for you in less than half an hour. Every thing is unpacked now.”

In a wonderfully short space of time after the discovery of the precious letter, Mrs. Roberts, with her son and younger daughter, had made their way to the drawing-room of Mrs. Horace Hopperton. The lady was fortunately not yet in it, and their cards and introduction were sent to her. The examination of their documents, however, did not detain her long, for she made her appearance before her stranger guests had had

half time enough to admire all the elegance of the apartment into which they had been shown.

Nothing could be more courteous than her reception of them. She looked at the handsome faces of the brother and sister, and immediately decided that they would do very well in a waltz; and as Mrs. Roberts was very handsomely dressed, there seemed to be no impediment whatever to her producing them, by way of variety, at her weekly *soirée*, which was to take place on the morrow. Mrs. Roberts failed not to mention, incidentally, that besides a husband, who did not now go much into company, she had the happiness of possessing another daughter, and also that Miss Harrington, the daughter and heiress of Sir Christopher Harrington, was travelling with them. This information produced a general invitation for the whole party; and never did three visitors depart from a house better satisfied with the reception they had received in it, than did Mrs. Roberts and her son and daughter. There was a fine triumphant glow on the cheek of Agatha when she met the family at the dinner-table on that eventful day, but there was something in the glances exchanged between Mrs. Roberts and her

two younger children that was perhaps more triumphant still ; but each party was coquetting with the curiosity of the other, and the soup was done with, and the *pièce de resistance* half carved, before either began to utter what they were bursting to say.

At length Mrs. Roberts addressed her elder daughter in a gentle, humble sort of tone, saying, "Well, my dear, had you the good fortune to meet the princess at home?"

"Yes, ma'am, I had," replied Agatha. And there she stopped.

"Was she civil, my dear?" resumed Mrs. Roberts, meekly.

"Civil, ma'am?" echoed her daughter, in rather an indignant accent. "Civil!—what a phrase! The Princess Yabiolporakiosky, ma'am, was every thing to me that I had a right to expect from the bosom friend of my dear Siandrina! She is an angel! But I am sorry to say that I fear she will be found extremely exclusive in her circle. I am not without fear that I shall have some difficulty in introducing you all—we are such an immense party! Perhaps I might manage as to Edward and Maria, but as to Miss Harrington, I

am sorry to tell you, my dear," she added, bowing to Bertha across the table, "that I see no chance for you. And as to you, ma'am," turning to her mother, "we must see about it; we must have a little patience."

"Oh, certainly, my dear! I am quite aware of that. Does the princess receive, Agatha?"

"Yes, ma'am; a very brilliant assembly, I believe, once every month."

"ONCE every month," repeated Mrs. Roberts, exchanging glances with Maria and Edward.

"Why you don't suppose, ma'am, that a person so sought, as I am quite sure the Princess Yabiolporakiosky is, could stay at home to receive every night, do you?"

"No, Agatha, not *every* night; but many people of fashion, you know, receive every week; and that, if it is well done, helps the society of a place amazingly. The princess did not happen to invite you to come to her in a friendly way to-morrow evening, did she?"

"To-morrow evening? No, ma'am, she did not," replied Agatha, rather solemnly. "But I think it extremely likely she might have done so, had she not been engaged, as she told me, to a

very splendid party ; to which, dear creature ! she said she would give the world to introduce me, were it possible to do so ; but till I have been seen, she confesses, it would be more than she could venture. Mrs. Horace Hopperton, she told me, was the most exclusive person in Rome."

"Who, my dear?" said Mrs. Roberts, with increasing gentleness.

"Mrs. Horace Hopperton," repeated Agatha, haughtily ; "but I really cannot conceive, ma'am, what interest you can feel in hearing me repeat her name."

"I beg your pardon for troubling you so, my dear," returned her mother ; "but I thought I might have mistaken what you said. We are going—that is, your brother, and sister, and I—to Mrs. Horace Hopperton's to-morrow night."

"You, ma'am?" cried Agatha, becoming suddenly as red as an old-fashioned peony. "You? what *do* you mean, ma'am? What joke have you got now?"

"Joke, Agatha? What joke have *you* got, child? Do you suppose that because you stalk off with the footman in search of princesses, the rest of the family are to sit still at home till you

please to come back again? Is that your notion, Miss Roberts?"

"Oh, that's it, is it?" replied Agatha, curling her lip. "You intend to punish me for the sin of having a friend of my own, by trying to mystify me. I really should hardly have expected that Edward and Maria would have joined in such an abortive attempt."

"I don't know what you call an abortive attempt," returned Maria; "unless it was that mamma's attempt to get you invited with us might be said to be rather abortive, I don't think that you would easily find any adventure less so, than our visit of this morning to Mrs. Horace Hopperton. If the greatest kindness and most cordial reception could justify one's calling a middle-aged lady an angel, I should be apt to declare that our new acquaintance was probably quite as angelic as yours."

Agatha stared at them all with astonishment and agitation.

"Are you really in earnest?" said she, almost panting with emotion.

"Yes, to be sure we are," cried Edward, laughing. "One would think, to hear you, that

we had never been invited to a party before. What is there so very extraordinary in it?"

"What is there extraordinary? How on earth have you managed to get an introduction and an invitation since I left you all languidly looking out of the window this morning?" demanded Agatha. "And such an introduction, and such an invitation!" she added. "I don't, I won't, I can't believe it."

"Very well," said Edward, "we won't say any more about it now; when we come home to-morrow night, we will bring you a description of the Princess Yab—you must let me call her Yab if she be ten times an angel, Agatha—for I shall never remember her infernal name. And so the Yab told you that she could not take you to Mrs. Horrace Hopperton's, did she? Poor you! I am really very sorry for you, Agatha."

"If you *are* in earnest, and if you all have contrived to get invited without me," returned Agatha, "you have used me shamefully, and you shall be punished for it, as sure as I am alive—that you shall, one and all of you, TRUST ME."

"Why, what a goose you are, Agatha!" cried

her mother, with a timely laugh; "what a perfect gosling, not to understand a joke better than that."

"What, it is all a joke then!" returned her daughter, with a look of very unequivocal scorn. "I certainly shall not retort your elegant compliment, ma'am, and call *you* a goose, but I must take leave to think that there was but little wit in your pleasantry."

"I don't think there was much, my dear," replied her mother, with exquisite sweetness of temper; "but who would have thought of your ever believing seriously for a single moment, that I had really suffered you to be left out of the invitation? Did I ever do such a thing in my life, Agatha?"

"Was it only *that* part of it that was the joke?" cried Agatha, with more earnest solemnity of manner than she would have indulged the jesters with, if she could have helped it; but her feelings really overpowered her too completely to permit her studying accent. "Do you really mean that you have contrived to make the acquaintance of Mrs. Horace Hopperton, and that you have seen her?"

It must be observed that at the critical moment when there appeared to be considerable probability of a serious quarrel between Mrs. Roberts and her eldest daughter, the peaceable master of the family (who was sinking with wonderful rapidity into the slippered pantaloons) left the room, the dinner being over, and Miss Harrington rose likewise, and followed his example; so that the conclusion of this interesting scene was not witnessed by any, save the actors in it. In reply to Agatha's last question, Mrs. Roberts got up, and kissed the sublime forehead of her elder daughter with strong emotion.

"Yes, my dear love!" she exclaimed; "yes, we do mean it; and is there any one for whose dear sake this little clever manœuvre on my part has given me more pleasure than for yours? But there shall be no reproaches, girls—no reproaches, Edward. We are all now going on so well, we are in such an excellent train for recovering all we have lost, that it would be worse than foolish, it would be positively sinful, to do any thing but rejoice and push forward."

"Hurrah! mother!" exclaimed Edward, vehemently clapping his hands. "Upon my soul

you are, in your way, the very best old woman in the world."

"Upon my word," said Maria, "I think so too."

"And I am sure I have no inclination to differ from you," rejoined Agatha, very graciously. "If mamma's joke produced too great an effect upon me, she must reproach her own good, clever acting for it. I certainly am very thankful," she added, "that we seem at last likely to get out of the slough of despond, into which we had suffered ourselves to plunge so desperately upon finding that our friends had not yet reached Rome. How differently every thing appears now, doesn't it? I declare to you that at this moment, dearly as I value, and ever must value, the flattering attachment of Montgomery, I feel that I am capable of enjoying the society of my fellow-creatures, provided they are of a proper class, as much as I ever did in my life."

"And I assure you, Agatha, I am not disposed to be behind-hand with you in good sense and proper feeling. Thank Heaven! I, too, have a heart capable of loving more than one of my fellow-creatures," replied her sister.

“That is all very well, my dears,” said Mrs. Roberts, rather gravely. “I am very well pleased to see you looking like yourselves again. But you must not forget, if you please, that noble-men with twenty thousand a year don’t grow on every hedge.”

CHAPTER III.

THE anticipation of brilliant results from the introduction to Mrs. Horace Hopperton were fully and immediately verified, and once again the Robertses found themselves moving in the gayest circle that the place, which for the time being they called their home, afforded. It may truly be said of them, that on this, and all similar occasions, they very strictly obeyed the good-humoured maxim, which bids us "look on every thing on its best side." Had they done the reverse, they might have discovered in the brilliant-looking throng which filled that lady's three saloons, several individuals whom they would have

run out of the room to avoid in home-bred England; but they scorned to bestow their attentions while on their travels upon any thing so contemptible as mere personal character; and devoting their observations entirely to the brighter side of the picture, they perceived to their unspeakable delight that they were again "*keeping company*" (to use their own phrase) with persons to whom their own station in society gave them no right to approach. This was enough; they scarcely asked of the gods to grant them any greater blessing, and might have said in the words of our Dacre Petrarch,

"Let but the cheat endure, I ask not ought beside."

In short, Mrs. Horace Hopperton was one of those persons who, having plenty of money, contrive to find some charm of the genuine "*Duc ad me*" kind (sovereign for "conjuring fools into a circle"), by which they collect princes and black-legs, cardinals and ribald infidels, ambassadors and broken merchants, English peeresses and *ci-devant* French actresses under their roof, with no other condition annexed, than that they should be, or at least seem to be, tolerably well dressed.

Rome was by no means very full when the delighted Robertses were first installed among the *habitués* of Mrs. Horace Hopperton's splendid palazzo. November was not yet over, and many of those who proposed to make the eternal city their winter residence had not yet arrived, so that in truth they were quite a treasure to her. None but ladies who give a *soirée dansante* every week, can be aware of the value of such an importation as the two pretty Miss Robertses and their well-dressed brother. Mrs. Horace Hopperton had been greatly pleased also by the bonnet and cloak of Mrs. Roberts at their first interview, nor was she at all insensible to the name of Sir Christopher Harrington, whose title, on referring to her baronetage, she found to be of a very respectably old creation; but when she saw the whole group in full ball costume, their white shoulders displayed to the fullest possible extent, and their peculiarly small waists, braced into such miniature dimensions as must of necessity set everybody talking of them, she was perfectly enchanted. She civilly lamented the absence of Miss Harrington, who had declined coming with them, but was too well satisfied with those who were pre-

sent to think much of the absent ; and before the evening was half over, it was evident that she meant to be on terms of very affectionate intimacy with the mother and daughters, and of pleasant playful familiarity with the son.

The impression of that mother's admirable conduct in having got them all admitted to this enchanting new acquaintance, was too fresh in the memory of Agatha, to permit of her adhering to the exclusive system she had begun, respecting the Princess Yabiolporakiosky. She presented mother, sister, and brother, to her admired new friend, and had the pleasure of perceiving that, though they were not received with the same full-fledged affection as herself (which of course she did not wish they should be), yet that they were considered worthy of a very bewitching smile apiece. And, in truth, to people who valued either princessly smiles or beautiful smiles, those of the Princess Yabiolporakiosky were worth having, for the name and rank of her husband were of high nobility, though the autocrat of all the Russias had thought it best, in consequence of a *bon-mot* which had been reported to him as having been uttered by the prince, to request him to

take up his abode for a few years in Siberia; and as to the *beauty* of her smiles, it would have been difficult to find any more universally or more deservedly popular. The Princess Yabiolporakiosky was, in truth, a *very* beautiful woman. The accident which had befallen her husband in the manner above related, had induced her to ask the emperor's permission to travel, which had been graciously granted, and this was the fair creature's second winter in Italy. That her *salon* was one of the most distinguished in Rome, is quite certain; but to persons unacquainted with the mysterious anomalies of continental society, a detailed description of the elements of which it was composed would appear much too absurdly improbable to be credited, and therefore no such description shall be attempted. Let it suffice to say that English fathers and mothers, when they decide upon finishing the education of their daughters by a continental tour, should not invariably receive the words DISTINGUISHED SALON, as a certificate of the respectability of the assemblies to which it is applied.

No previous success of the Roberts family had produced sensations of more unmixed delight

among them, than did the manner in which they were received by all to whom they were presented on this eventful evening. The Roman winter was, as we have said, only just beginning, and a group of young faces, even if less handsome than those of the Robertses, would have been well received by those who were self-elected as ball-givers for the ensuing season ; and when, in addition to their good looks and becoming dresses, it was discovered that they all waltzed well, it seemed to be at once decided that they were to be taken into general favour, and made *the fashion*.

In whose favour was such a beneficent resolution ever taken, without their immediately becoming sensible of its flattering effects ? Again, again, and again, did Mrs. Horace Hopperton win her not easy way to the delighted Mrs. Roberts, stating the wish for an introduction to her and her charming family, not only from the dancing gentlemen, who pleaded for the happiness of waltzing with the new beauties, but also from the still more important individuals in whose various drawing-rooms this first object of youthful existence was to be carried on.

In short, the evening's amusement was perfect in every feature; and when, as they drove home, Maria said, addressing her companions *en masse*, "Did you ever spend a more agreeable evening in your life?" the word "*never*" was most cordially uttered in reply by them all.

So far all was well, nay, more than well, despite the heavy disappointment which had greeted their arrival; and Rome, from the "dirtiest, dullest old place they had ever seen," had already become in their estimation, one of the most enchanting residences in the world. But, alas! in this defective state of existence, it is difficult, if not impossible to enjoy any felicity, however great, without some drawback, some alloy, which if it does not destroy, at least in some degree dims its brightness! That night Mrs. Roberts and her three children went to bed in a state of perfect contentment. The past, and all its difficulties, its fears, and its regrets, vanished from the memories of all; their dropping to sleep was delicious, and their dreams ecstatic. But at an early hour on the following morning Mrs. Roberts contrived to get her three children round her; and though still looking, on the whole, vastly more light-hearted than she had

done since the Lynberry and the Montgomery had left Baden, she said to them in an accent in which considerable anxiety might be detected,

“ And now, dears, what do you think we must do about a carriage ? I had certainly completely made up my mind that for this winter we must content ourselves with hiring one, when we absolutely could not do without it ; but now, your poor father is positively killing himself with anxiety about the money—and yet—it really is very difficult to decide—every thing seems to open before us so brilliantly, doesn’t it ? Do tell me, dears, what you think I ought to do ? ”

Maria looked at her elder sister, and so did Edward too, but as he did so he shrugged his shoulders, and said, “ The question in my opinion lies in a nut-shell—I should not suppose there could be two opinions on the subject.”

“ Nor I either, I confess,” said Agatha. “ As to my father’s nervous vagaries, ma’am, he has been subject to them as long as I can remember any thing. Don’t you recollect the way he put himself into, the year before last, when you proposed my having riding lessons ? I had the les-

sons though, a dozen of them, and he was never a bit the worse for it. And to tell you the truth, ma'am, my own opinion decidedly is, that if your plans and views respecting us are to be dependent on my father's whims, you have done very, *very* wrong to bring us abroad. The doing so was decidedly a great effort, a very great effort—it showed great courage and decision of character on your part, for of course we all know that you were the author of the scheme; and I cannot but think that if you will recall to mind the sort of society to which we were accustomed in London, and then contrast it with that in which we were so flatteringly received last night, you will be ready to allow that, so far, all your hopes have been realised.”

“They have indeed, Agatha, and more—oh! a thousand times more than realised! Nevertheless, I won't deny that in a pecuniary point of view the coming abroad has *not* answered so well as I was led to expect it would do. But on this point I have surely no reason to blame myself. I suspect that the people from whom I got my information did not get into the sort of society that we have done, and this of course is quite sufficient to account for the difference.”

“ Most certainly it is, ma’am,” replied Agatha, with a little laugh that seemed to throw ridicule upon the idea that there could be any doubt about it; “ and though I never, as I am sure you will allow, make you fine speeches, but on the contrary, speak my real opinion on all subjects with the most perfect sincerity, I must say that I think the manner in which you have managed to bring us forward, and place us, as you have done, in the very first class of European society, does you infinite honour. And I certainly shall be very sorry, not only for our sakes, but for yours, if you suffer your plans and manner of going on to be paralysed by the weakness of my father’s character—who is evidently, poor man ! very fast declining into old age and imbecility. Some people do grow old so much sooner than others ! I don’t suppose that he is much above ten years your senior, yet I am sure any one would suppose he was twenty or thirty years older than you are.”

“ Yes, poor dear man ! he certainly is growing old apace ; I see it as plainly as you do, Agatha,” replied Mrs. Roberts, pitifully shaking her false curls ; “ but still, you know, it is *his* signature,

and not *mine*, that must bring us the supplies; and as he never ceased all the time we were at Baden to make a fuss about our constantly having a carriage, I am afraid I shall find it very hard work to make him consent to it here. And yet I confess I do not see how it is possible for us to get on without it."

"Out of the question, ma'am, utterly out of the question," returned Agatha. "It would be infinitely better at once to make up our minds to refuse all invitations, and to pass the rest of our winter at Rome exactly in the manner in which we passed the first week, than to beguile ourselves with the belief that we can associate with such people as we were introduced to last night, without having a carriage."

"Good gracious, Agatha! don't say that!" exclaimed Maria, with a look and voice of the deepest melancholy. "I do think it would be quite too hard upon me, after I have exerted myself as I have done, and roused all my proper pride to bear the disappointment of not finding Lynberry here with proper spirit—I do think it will be too hard upon me, Agatha, if you try to persuade mamma that it will be best for us to

give up going out! I am sure that as far as I am concerned, I would a thousand times rather *walk* to the parties than not go to them at all."

"Well, my dears, if you would all of you make up your dear minds together, to try such a scheme, I won't throw any difficulties in the way of it. I dare say I could have a stout pair of clogs made that would keep my feet dry, and with good cloaks and umbrellas one may do a great deal. And I own I quite agree with Maria in thinking that it *would* be much better to walk to the parties than not to go at all, and pass our time in the horrid dismal way we did last week," said Mrs. Roberts.

Had not the indignation of Agatha at this proposal been really too great to leave her the power of speaking, her mother would not have reached the conclusion of her last speech without interruption; but having at length found breath, she said, with flashing eyes and energetic accent, "I must beg that I may not be forced to listen to such absurdities, ma'am, as you and Maria have just thought fit to utter. I am in earnest; and if you are in jest, as you were yesterday, I request that you would be pleased to tell me so.

I can employ my time better than in listening to such very absurd *plaisanteries*."

"Upon my word, Agatha, I was not in joke," replied Maria, with more courage than her mother at that moment ventured to display. "I assure you, Agatha, I mean exactly what I say. I *would* rather, a GREAT, GREAT deal rather, walk in mud-boots to such a party as we were at last night, and deliberately sit down in the ante-room, and take them off before the eyes of all the servants, than not go at all. But I don't tell you, Agatha, that I think it would be wise in mamma to make us do it. Nor do I in my heart believe it absolutely necessary."

"Necessary!" repeated the indignant Agatha, still pale with anger, "necessary? And pray, if that be necessary, why is it not equally so that we should lodge ourselves with the veterino drivers, and other refuse of the people? What is the difference, I should like to know, between the one degradation and the other? I see none."

"No difference, Agatha, between lodging with stable-boys and drivers, and the not having a carriage of our own?" said Mrs. Roberts, reproachfully. "Oh! Agatha!"

"There is no difference, ma'am, in the principle

—none whatever. In both cases we should be placed without the pale of good society. And *that*, THAT once submitted to, I should care not a straw, as far as I am concerned, for any thing else that could happen to me.”

“It is impossible not to admire your noble feelings, my dearest Agatha,” returned her mother, touched to the very heart by such a display of high-minded superiority; “and yet, my dear, if you will quietly think of it for a minute, you will see that it is not my admiring you ever so much that can raise the money for paying the carriage. Isn’t that true, Agatha? Now, don’t be unfair, my dear girl, but confess honestly at once that what I say is true.”

“Indeed, ma’am, I shall confess no such thing,” returned Agatha, “for I should falsify every feeling and every opinion if I did. My knowledge of human nature convinces me that when the will is firm, stedfast, and uncompromising, NOTHING can stand against it. I know not, my eyes never beheld, the man capable of making *me* change any opinion I had formed, or any resolution I had taken. And I leave you to guess, therefore, in what light I must view your doubts and fears

respecting my father's liking or disliking that a carriage should be hired."

"Yes, yes, dear Agatha," replied her mother, "I quite understand that. But after all, my dear, it is not so much his likes or dislikes as the money. I do really believe that such a fine mind and noble character as yours might be capable of almost every thing in the world, except finding money where there is none. But even you, Agatha, must confess *that* to be impossible."

"Upon my word, ma'am, I must again repeat that I shall confess no such thing," returned her daughter. "I presume that when you use the word *money*, you do not literally mean the sovereigns and dollars that are tossed about for daily use? Of course you cannot be quite so childish as that. I really do not suspect you of it. You speak not of *coin*, but of means. The steadfastness of will, and the firmness of purpose to which I allude, will certainly not expend itself in seeking shillings and sixpences in odd corners where they are not to be found. Its sphere of action is somewhat higher than that, ma'am. I will not attempt at this moment to enter upon any general

explanation of the various ways by which a powerful mind is able to control circumstances, but will only say, what in fact is all that is necessary at the present moment, that were I you, ma'am, I should instantly commission Edward to find his way to the first establishment for letting out carriages in Rome, to select two of the handsomest-looking and most commodious equipages he can find—one open for the mornings, the other close for the night work, and to engage the use of them for three months certain, together with a good pair of horses and a respectable coachman. This is what *I* should do; and as to the payment for them, I should trust for finding wherewithal to the same energy of character which dictated the ordering it. Do this, ma'am, without wasting any superfluous anxiety upon the subsequent question of ways and means, and depend upon it every thing will go on smoothly."

"Indeed, Agatha, I feel it would be folly not to lean for support upon such a character as yours. It would be ungrateful to Providence for having bestowed on me the blessing of such a daughter!"

And Mrs. Roberts was so much touched as she uttered these words, that she drew out her pocket-handkerchief and blew her nose.

“Go, then, my dear Edward,” she resumed, “go, and do for us the good service that your dear sister has suggested; and you may order the carriage to come to the door this morning at two. She is an extraordinary creature, Edward, isn’t she?” added the proud mother, slightly passing her pocket-handkerchief across her eyes.

“Why yes, ma’am, Agatha is up to a thing or two,” replied the young man, “there is no denying that.”

CHAPTER IV.

It did not greatly signify, for if it did not come to pass one day, it certainly would another, but it so chanced that poor Mr. Roberts happened to be standing in the little balcony upon which the two windows of the drawing-room opened, when the carriage thus obtained drove up to the door, with Edward lounging on the front seat of it.

“Dear me, what a gay carriage!” said he, stepping back into the room, and addressing his wife, who, unluckily for her, was busily engaged in putting together the component parts of her last new bonnet, which, for the convenience of packing, had been taken to pieces. “Whose smart

carriage can this be, I wonder, and how has Edward contrived to get into it?"

Heartily did Mrs. Roberts wish that she had contented herself with the dim light of her bedroom, instead of venturing at such a moment into the general sitting apartment. But her employment had beguiled her into a complete forgetfulness of time, and it was, in fact, later by an hour than she supposed it to be. She now gathered up her work in haste, and was hurrying from the room, seemingly without having heard the half-exclamation, half-inquiry of her husband; but the worthy gentleman had not yet reached that state of morbid indifference to what was going on around him, which is sometimes found by such active and excellent managers as Mrs. Roberts, to be the most agreeable mood of mind that a husband can be brought into—this mood he had not yet fully reached, and gave proof of it by repeating with very troublesome pertinacy, "Whose smart carriage is that?"—nay, he even exerted himself sufficiently to lay a restraining hand upon the lock of the door while he mildly but earnestly said, "Do tell me, Sarah, whose carriage that is?"

“Whose carriage? why the livery-man’s carriage, to be sure. What can his name signify? Don’t hold the door in that way, sir, but open it, if you please, directly. I don’t want to keep the girls waiting,” said Mrs. Roberts, boldly.

“Stay long enough, wife, to answer me one question,” returned her husband, still resolutely keeping his hand on the lock of the door, “tell me if that carriage is hired for you? That is to say, Sarah, have we got to pay for it?”

“Pay for it!” cried Mrs. Roberts, in an accent of profound contempt, “what a perfect curmudgeon you do grow, Roberts! I wonder you don’t ask who is to pay for every morsel of bread we eat. Once for all, sir, I wish you to understand that I will not be interfered with in my domestic arrangements. Nobody yet ever suspected me of not knowing how to manage a family. I have been married to you five-and-twenty years, sir, and you won’t deny, I suppose, that I have been always looked up to by every body as one of the very best of managers. I never asked any of my neighbours yet what I ought to get for my family and what I ought not, and I don’t mean to begin now, I promise you.”

“Then, Sarah, I am a ruined man!” exclaimed Mr. Roberts, in a voice that trembled from very genuine emotion. “That desperate manner of speaking shows it as clear as light. ’Tis all humbug, Sarah; all that you have been saying to me about our affairs, for months past, is all humbug! Where are the girls’ lovers that you talked about? Where is the chance of Edward’s getting the rich young lady for a wife? Doesn’t she shut herself up from you all, as if on purpose to show that she won’t have him? It’s all humbug, Mrs. Roberts, all humbug, and I am a ruined man!”

“If you are ruined it will be your own fault, and nobody else’s,” returned his wife, with vehement indignation, arising from the consciousness of her own enlarged views, contrasted with the pitiful littleness of his. “It is easy enough to see the sort of way you would take, in order to keep your children back in the world, and prevent them from rising a single peg higher than you have managed to do yourself. But *my* children have too much of their mother in them to bear it, and so you will find, sir. It may, perhaps, be in your power to prevent the great, the unhopèd-for advantages with which they are now surrounded

from doing them any real good. I dare say it may be in your power to do that. But it is not in your power, nor ever will be, to turn them back again into poor tame ignorant clods, contented with having as much food as they want, and clothes enough to keep them warm. You'll never be able to turn the chosen friends of nobles and princesses into such animals as that; and the consequence of your making a stand against drawing for sufficient money for the necessary expenses of our present station in life will be following our children to an early grave. I don't mean to talk about myself. I know you don't consider me now of much consequence to any body. You have taken it into your poor old head that nobody knows any thing but yourself, and you may soon dance over my grave by way of proving you are right."

At this point, indignation and contempt gave way to grief, and Mrs. Roberts drew out her pocket-handkerchief, and wept violently.

"Sarah!" said her husband, after a short sharp struggle with his common sense, which was beat out of the field by his habitual deference and habitual affection for his wife, "Sarah!" he said,

“I am many years older than you, and if one of us is doomed to die of a broken heart, it had better be me. But just let me say one last word, and then go on as you think best. My belief is that we shall all be ruined—downright, positively ruined, by the trying to live among all these fine folks. But don’t cry any more, Sarah, don’t cry. I am willing to do whatever you like. I am sure you mean to do every thing for the best, my dear, and if it don’t answer, why I am sure it won’t be the fault of your will; so don’t cry, Sarah! and you shan’t find that I’ll plague you with my dismal forebodings any more.”

“Keep but your word in that, my dear Roberts,” she replied with sudden animation, and raising herself on tip-toe to give him a kiss, “keep but your word in that, and depend upon it that every thing will go well, and we never shall have any difference between us again.”

The good man sighed, but not ostentatiously, returned his wife’s kiss very kindly, and then threw open the door for her to pass. But Mrs. Roberts was at that identical moment very nearly penniless; the large supply drawn for before they quitted Baden having being so nearly absorbed

by the unexpected amount of the various claims upon her, as barely to leave sufficient for the journey; the two hundred pounds which she had calculated would remain, with which to commence their Roman campaign, having so completely vanished as scarcely to have left a trace even on her memory. She felt, therefore, that she should by no means be doing her duty to herself and her dear children, if she omitted the present very favourable opportunity of obtaining a further supply, and she therefore said, in a pleasant, confidential tone, which could not fail of being soothing to the feelings of her husband, who had not of late been treated with much attention by his greatly occupied family,

“Nay, shut the door again, dear Roberts, I have a hundred things that I want to say to you, and lately you have always seemed so poorly, and disinclined to talk, that I have not liked to trouble you; but I wish to tell you, my dear, that you are quite mistaken about Edward’s match with Bertha being off. It never was so perfectly certain as it is at this moment. She is an odd-tempered girl, I won’t deny that, and if Edward was a common sort of character, I might perhaps

have some anxiety about his being happy with her. But he is so very superior, and has such uncommon powers of mind, and knows how to influence those he lives with in such an extraordinary manner, that I feel no alarm on that score. So there you may be easy, my dear; and as to the girls, they have only to be seen! In your life you never beheld any thing like the fuss that was made with them last night! There were no less than five noblemen and one prince that desired to be introduced to them; and the ladies of the very highest rank that desired to make my acquaintance, was really something quite extraordinary! But of course you know that though we may be quite sure that all this sort of thing must sooner or later lead to the permanent establishment of our dear children in the exalted station of life for which they are evidently so peculiarly qualified—though we cannot with any reasonable use of our eyes and understanding doubt *this* final result, it is impossible to deny that a little present ready money is absolutely necessary; and what *I* feel, Roberts, is that we ought to be thankful to Providence—very thankful indeed—that enabled you, by a little steady

industry and perseverance, to realise enough to enable us to conquer what I have no doubt has often proved an insuperable difficulty to many people. And it is this consideration, my dear Roberts, that ought now and always to prevent your feeling any repugnance for drawing for the necessary supplies. Trust me, my dear, it will all come back to you, and with interest. I did not mean to say any thing about it till to-morrow, because we have several calls to make to-day, but as we are upon the subject, it will save us both trouble if you will give me a draft now. I understand that if people can show that they have any decent introductions here, Torlonia will cash a draft at sight, and I am sure that will be monstrous convenient just now, for the journey has left me quite dry."

During the latter part of this speech, Mrs. Roberts had been engaged in bringing forward and unlocking her writing-desk, which contained all she wanted for carrying through the business she was upon.

"Let it be five-hundred, Roberts, will you, dear? Less than that will really be of no use at all."

“But don’t you expect a remittance from Miss Harrington’s aunt, my dear?” said Mr. Roberts, holding the pen she had given him suspended over the paper. “If I don’t mistake, it is several weeks behind-hand.”

“What, Bertha’s hundred pounds for this current quarter? Oh no, my dear, it is not behind-hand at all. How could you suppose that such a manager as I am could have suffered that? Oh no! we got that just before we set off from Baden; and lucky it was that we did, for we never should have got here without it. But do write the draft, my dear Roberts, will you? The poor dear girls will think that I have quite forgotten them.”

Mr. Roberts re-adjusted the paper before him, dipped the pen in the ink, and wrote the draft for the sum named. But before he signed his name to it he paused, and seemed for a minute or two deeply absorbed in thought. During this interval the countenance of his wife became greatly overclouded, and a look of red and resolute purpose succeeded to the radiant good-humour it had before exhibited. After the pause described, Mr. Roberts, pushing the paper a little away from

him, looked up in the face of his wife. If any thought of remonstrance still lingered in his mind, it vanished as he did so, and in the next moment his name was subscribed to the draft.

The next time that the voice of Mr. Roberts was heard to utter a command, it pronounced these words to his youngest daughter : " Maria, order the man-servant to let me have hot water, sugar, and brandy brought to me every evening before he goes out with the carriage." And this order was given and obeyed.

CHAPTER V.

WHILE the affairs of Mrs. Roberts and her children went on thus prosperously at Rome, those of Mr. Roberts and Miss Harrington, who were both left pretty much to their own devices, were managed on principles diametrically opposite to any which regulated the movements of the rest of the family, but which resembled each other very closely. For while Mrs. and the two Miss Robertses, together with Mr. Edward Roberts, were making the most vehement exertions, and with great success, to pass as many hours of their existence as possible in a crowd, Mr. Roberts and Miss Harrington limited their quieter labours to the endeavour of keeping themselves

in their separate little spheres, as much alone as possible.

As to Mr. Roberts, poor man! he had made up his mind to live peaceably, trouble nobody, and trust to chance for what was to come next. He had meditated a good deal, before he had reached this state of mind, on the two very different terminations predicted by himself and his wife to the race they were running. These meditations had by no means lessened his fears, or strengthened his hopes; but the more he reflected on the leading features of his lady's character, and the more meekly conscious these sober reasonings made him of his own, the more deeply he became convinced that though it might be in his power to make them all lead a life of wrangling dissension, it was not in his power to keep them within the bounds of what he considered to be prudence, and he therefore deliberately and resolutely decided upon letting them have their own way. He thought it most likely that his wife would stop short before she had spent quite all that he had belonging to him, and that the best thing he could do would be to prepare himself for the manner of life which he thought likely, at no very great distance of time,

to follow that which they were pursuing at present. He positively refused to have either a new coat or a new hat, both which articles were certainly wanting to render his appearance fit for exhibition. He freely acknowledged this to be the case, but brought the argument to a conclusion by declaring that he did not like to go into company, and therefore should always stay at home. The resolution thus proclaimed was not perhaps altogether disagreeable to his family, and Mrs. Roberts did not look at all angry as she replied, "Well, my dear, if you feel *that*, I don't see any use in the world in dragging you about, and keeping you out of your bed, when I dare say it would be a great deal better for your health that you should be in it. And if that's settled, you are quite right about not having a coat, for Heaven knows it is the duty of both of us to spare everything we can in the way of expense, just at the very time that the dear children are wanting every farthing we can manage to spend, in order to prevent their losing the great advantages of what we are doing for them."

"Very well, Sarah, then we are agreed about that," said Mr. Roberts in reply, and not wishing

to hear any more just then of the "great advantages" of which he had already heard so much, he left the room as he spoke. It was within an hour or two of this conversation that Mr. Roberts gave the order for the constant supply of brandy-and-water which has been mentioned above ; and those who had seen him as he stepped on board the steam-boat on the Thames, rather less than eighteen months before, had they looked at him only one month after this new arrangement had taken place, would either not have recognised him at all, or would have imagined that he must be under the influence of some slow-working poison, which, though it did not appear immediately to threaten his existence, must sooner or later bring him to the grave.

Nor would such imaginings have very widely erred. But though strong brandy-and-water, taken constantly and copiously, is probably far from wholesome, it could not, unaided by other causes, have wrought this sudden change, though it might have assisted it. The case, however, is not a rare one, though it has not been much examined into or commented upon. Poor Mr. Roberts is not the only man who has been coaxed into

leaving his native British home for the sake of saving money and improving his sons and daughters, and who has discovered too late that neither of these objects has been obtained by his expatriation. He is not the first who has felt, that among all the new and startling objects which encompass him with oppressive strangeness in a foreign land, the most new, the most startling, and the most painfully strange, is the aspect and bearing of his own family. Let it not be supposed, however, that this observation has the remotest reference to one of the highest and most rational enjoyments of civilised life, namely, that of travelling in search of all that is best worth looking upon in nature and in art. It would indeed be absurd to confound the happy power of travelling far and wide for the purpose of bringing home the memory of objects which may be dwelt upon with pleasure through a long life, with that of running the desperate risk of exchanging a native home for a foreign one. The doing this where there is a reasonable hope of improving health thereby is quite right. Nay, there is probably nothing very importantly wrong in it, where a man and his wife, having no children,

have nothing but their own pleasure to consult ; and still less, perhaps, can those who are doomed to content themselves with single blessedness, be blamed for seeking amelioration of their solitary condition, wherever they fancy it likely to be found. But alas for the facile husband and indulgent father who yields his judgment to the ambitious aspirations of his woman-kind, and decides upon taking up his abode upon the continent !

* * * *

The similarity which has been alluded to between the mode of life of Mr. Roberts and that of Miss Harrington, did not extend to the brandy-and-water—indeed, it chiefly consisted in the determination of both not to join in the festivities to which the rest of the family were devoting themselves.

It could hardly be expected, perhaps, that any girl of seventeen could be thrust out from her natural home in the way Bertha Harrington had been, and thrown among strangers, without graver consideration given to their fitness for the charge than had been deemed necessary in her case, without some injurious effect arising from it.

Bertha was still a pure-minded, affectionate, unaffected girl, but she had become much too indifferent to the opinion of others (with the exception at least of one single individual), and too much disposed to believe that the only thing necessary to be attended to in the disposal of her time, at least for the present, was her own amusement, or, as she would have herself called it, her own improvement. The extreme repugnance with which the style and manners of the Roberts' race had inspired her, led her to believe that the first thing needful in the regulation of her own conduct, was to keep out of their way ; and to achieve this she certainly permitted herself a degree of independence in her proceedings, which could not safely be received as admissible in any code of young-lady-like regulations. Of all the books treating of Rome and its marvels, which she had chanced to get hold of, the "Corinne" of Madame de Staël had made the deepest impression. It was in fact her hand-book, her *vade mecum*, her delight. As to all the latter part of it, she had read it once, wept heartily, classed the hero in her mind as one of the vilest of the human race, and then turned back to the immortal pages sacred to Rome. To

see all that Corinne saw, was the first wish of her heart, and the first resolve of her bold young spirit. She blushed in her solitary chamber, as she caught herself wishing that her cousin William was there to go everywhere with her, as wicked Lord Neville had done with Corinne—and then she almost exclaimed aloud at the sin of letting such a false wretch as Neville enter her thoughts in connexion with Vincent. And then she took herself very severely to task for suffering herself to wish for her cousin William at all. That, all goodness and all kindness as he had been to her, he did not wish to be with her, was quite plain; and she only began to flatter herself that she was not, respecting her feelings for him, exactly every thing that she should most have hated to be, when it occurred to her that, after all, there was nothing perhaps in the world that she should really and truly like so well, as hiring a valet-de-place to be in constant attendance upon her every morning.

It required some exertion of the independent spirit to which her peculiar circumstances had given birth, to enable her to do this. Money she had at her command to a much greater extent than

the Robertses were aware, for her mysterious father had commissioned Lady Morton, soon after her arrival at Baden, to transmit to her circulating bills to the amount of two hundred pounds, with an intimation that an equal sum would be added to her private income as long as she continued abroad. This sum was as yet untouched, and it was her purpose to make a visit to the banking establishment of Messrs. Torlonia part of one of her earliest excursions, under the protection of her intended valet-de-place.

It took her a good while to decide upon the best mode of obtaining this necessary attendant, but at length she determined to ask the master of the circulating library in the Piazza di Spagna if he could recommend such a person. To this library she had already found her way on foot; and by the aid of her very quiet dress, and a thick veil, she had managed to go and come (the distance was but short) without any misadventure whatever. Her application to the master of this little establishment was perfectly successful, as was also the request that she might meet the important person he recommended at his shop on the following day, in preference to his coming

to her at the lodgings, which might lead to questionings and discussions that she wished to avoid.

The meeting thus arranged took place with as little delay as possible, and the result enabled her to set forth the next day in a respectable looking carriage provided by her new attendant, with "Corinne" in her hand, and all her soul in her eyes.

But this masterly arrangement was not achieved without a vigorous attempt on the part of Mrs. Roberts to discover what the young lady was about. Conscientiously satisfied, indeed, that the alliance so happily secured for her with Edward, must effectually protect her from any possible ill consequence arising from the gossiping of idle tongues, she would have deemed any interference with her profitable young boarder's whims as an act scarcely less sinful than suicide; and on this occasion, therefore, as well as on various former ones, she resolved to keep clear of any such wickedness.

But, to say truth, there were other grounds on which the daily sight of this independent carriage alarmed her. Bertha, as it may

be remembered, had once hinted, upon being asked to contribute to the expense of the Baden carriage, that she conceived the four hundred per annum which was paid for her accommodation in Mrs. Roberts's family was intended to include it—a startling sort of reply, this, which had never been forgotten, and which had gone far towards establishing the very unusual degree of independence which the young lady enjoyed. And now, though it must be confessed that there was, in the self-assured step with which the youthful Bertha daily descended the stairs to her mysteriously obtained equipage, enough to alarm the most liberal-minded chaperon in existence; and though the extraordinary composure of manner with which she might be seen, day after day, to give her commands to her attentive valet-de-place as to the order of the morning's excursion, would naturally have suggested to most ladies, holding the responsible position assumed by Mrs. Roberts, that it would be quite as well to know how she disposed of herself during these long mornings, she was vastly less anxious as to any personal risk which the presumptuous young lady might run by so unusual a mode of proceeding, than concerning

the possibility that the "*idiot girl*," as she still sometimes affected to call her, might have taken it into her head to hire carriage, horses, coachman, and footman, all upon the Robertses' credit. As to the first, it would be easy enough for Edward to set all that to rights by and by; but as to the last, she conscientiously felt it to be her own especial duty to obtain information.

When this alarming possibility first suggested itself, the ample countenance of Mrs. Roberts glowed from forehead to chin, and from ear to ear. It was certainly very delightful to drive about in the enjoyment of the unrestrained conversation of her own children, but she felt that the disagreeable presence of Bertha must be endured by them all, if the annoyance was only to be avoided by having to pay for a second carriage.

The very earliest possible opportunity was seized by Mrs. Roberts for a *tête-à-tête* with Miss Harrington, in order to put this important matter upon a proper footing; and although the obtaining this was no very easy thing, from the strict blockade by which Bertha contrived to protect her own room, and the very few minutes which, except while at table, she spent out of it, perseverance at

length accomplished it, and Bertha found herself alone with Mrs. Roberts, and that lady stoutly standing between herself and the door.

“ I beg your pardon, my dear,” began the careful chaperon, “ for stopping you, because you seem rather in a hurry, but I can’t think I should be doing right, my dear Miss Bertha, if I didn’t make any observation about your driving about the town all alone, as you do. You know, my dear, that there is always, of course, a place kept vacant and ready for you in our carriage whenever you like to go out, and I therefore really don’t see what occasion you can possibly have for another.”

Poor Bertha, even in the midst of her resolute and unflinching resolution to follow her own inclinations till her cousin Vincent should again be near enough to substitute his as her rule—indeed even at the very moment that she braced her spirit to withstand every possible interference—felt that her much disliked hostess had some show of reason for her remonstrance;—and though her will was stedfast, her voice was gentle, as she replied,

“ A carriage entirely at my command is necessary for me, Mrs. Roberts, because I want to go

to places where nobody else wants to go; and I willingly pay for it myself, in order to avoid putting you and your daughters to the inconvenience of giving up any engagements of your own, in order to accommodate me."

"Well, my dear, I am sure it is impossible to say anything against that, because it is just the sort of genteel politeness which every one would like to see in a young lady of your rank and fortune. And I suppose, my dear, that you are quite sure that you have money enough to pay for it?"

Had Mrs. Roberts said one single syllable expressive of anxiety lest her young inmate might attract attention, and be deemed indiscreet, from the unprotected style in which she pursued her amusement, it might have gone far towards making the poor little girl more cautious in her proceedings, for there was no mixture of audacity in her courage, no wish for exemption from any restraint for which she could feel respect; but this allusion to her purse and its resources was most unfortunate: it offended and disgusted her in every way; and more than ever determined to assume the entire disposal of herself

till she should be happy enough to be again within reach of advice and protection which she could recognise as fit and proper, she brought the conversation to an abrupt conclusion by saying,

“Till I have given you some reason for it, madam, you have no right to suppose me capable of contracting debts which I am unable to pay ; and unless you wish me immediately to take measures for finding another home, you will do well to abstain from such interference with my conduct, as may render my present abode intolerable to me.”

“Dear me, Miss Harrington, I am sure I would not do anything of the kind, upon any account whatever ; on the contrary, my dear, I make it quite a point of honour towards your dear aunt to render all things as agreeable to you as possible.”

Such was the placable rejoinder of Mrs. Roberts, having quietly listened to which, Bertha left the room with the air of a young princess graciously accepting an apology for some inadvertent offence offered to her greatness.

“Won’t Master Edward bring her down a peg

or two, I wonder?" said Mrs. Roberts to her daughters, as she concluded her description of the above scene.

"If he does not," replied Agatha, "he will richly deserve to be brought down himself."

CHAPTER VI.

A SKILFUL pen, acting as a conductor to a tolerably observing mind, while engaged in ransacking Rome, might still find wherewithal to cover a good deal of paper in the genuine Corinne vein. But start not, gentle reader! No such hazardous attempt is about to be made here, either for your delectation or annoyance; it shall suffice to repeat that Bertha Harrington wearied not in the path she had chosen for herself, but persevered with an appetite that seemed to increase with what it fed on, in visiting and revisiting (and then coming back again to get another

look) all the most cherished objects which that immortal museum contains.

Now, though it had been gravely debated in the Roberts family only a few short months before, whether Miss Harrington was handsome or ugly; though she had been strongly suspected during that interval of being little better than an idiot in capacity; and though, worst of all perhaps, she dressed with no other object than to make herself as little conspicuous as possible, she nevertheless did not quite escape observation. Had she indeed been less lovely than she really was, the manner in which she was perpetually seen by those who had the same pursuits as herself, rambling in solitary enjoyment, and with no other protection than that afforded by an ordinary valet-de-place, from one end of Rome to the other, could scarcely fail of drawing a good deal more attention than she was at all aware of. But so utterly ignorant was Bertha of all that an acquaintance with the world can teach, and which nothing else can, that she felt as snugly secure as if she had been shut up in cotton; and as she rarely looked at any man or woman, except such as were made of marble, it did not occur to her

that the more insignificant portion of the creation formed of clay might, by possibility, take it into their poor mortal heads to look at her. This oversight on her part was unfortunate, as it exposed her to much that it would have been desirable she should avoid.

More gay young eyes had looked at her, and more gay old ones too had taken the same direction, than it is at all necessary to enumerate ; one single anecdote will suffice to show, to all whom it may concern, the danger of a young lady's fancying that she can take care of herself, without better assistance than that of a valet-de-place.

It happened that Bertha had worked up her fanciful young mind into a state of great enthusiasm for the Pantheon. There was something in its form and proportions, in the unwonted manner in which "thoughts commercing with the skies" might be followed by eyes wishing to commerce with them also, as well as in the contrast between its past and present dedication, which drew her again and again beneath its beautiful dome ; and often as she drove along the Via Sacra, she never failed to give it a fond look, which very often led to an affectionately long visit.

Twice had her accomplished valet-de-place followed her into the building, and twice followed her round it, reciting all the records concerning it, which it is so perfectly necessary for an unlearned lady to hear once, but so exceedingly annoying to listen to a second time. On her first visit she heard him with great attention; but during the second, her manner so evidently showed this intelligent official that his antiquarian lore was no longer required, that when she entered the building for the third time, he reposed himself on the step of the carriage as long as she stayed. This man, however, though professionally devoted to time past, was not so entirely withdrawn from time present as not to remark the singularity of his young mistress's mode of life. He had lived long enough in the world to know, that when pretty young ladies are in the habit of appearing abroad without any protection at all, they are generally supposed to be living under the especial protection of some person in particular. Nor did this experienced individual stop here in his conjectures respecting his juvenile patroness. If the solitary carriage, together with the many Roman memorials in the purchase of which she

indulged herself, convinced him that she *had* one particular "friend," the remarkable manner in which she haunted St. Peter's, the Pantheon, the Vatican, and so forth, evidently (after her first visit to each) preferring his absence to his presence, convinced him quite as firmly, that she either had, or intended to have, more than one.

It was then in front of the majestic portico of her favourite Pantheon, that the following dialogue took place, which will show clearly enough the sort of position in which the heiress of Sir Christopher Harrington had contrived to place herself, while strenuously endeavouring, with what she believed to be very praiseworthy resolution, to find consolation in her independence, for the desolate exile in which she seemed doomed to live.

Luigi Mondorlo had not been reading his "Ariosto" on the step of Miss Harrington's carriage for above half an hour on the fourth day that he had attended her to this admired edifice, when a young Englishman of rather distinguished manner and appearance came out of it, and having looked with somewhat of a scrutinising glance at the equipage for a minute or two, ad-

dressed him in pretty good Italian to the following effect.

“I think I know your face, my good fellow. If I am not mistaken, you are just the sort of person I am looking after for a friend of mine. Are you likely to be long engaged with the lady you are attending upon now?”

Mondorlo looked up at him with the keen quick glance of an Italian eye, and more than half smiled as he replied, “How does the signor know that I am in attendance upon any lady at all?”

The young Englishman returned the glance and the smile too, as he answered, “I believe you Italians think that no men have eyes but yourselves. But will you be pleased to answer my question?”

“Certainly,” replied the man, rising, “to the best of my knowledge I will answer it. I intend to remain in my present situation as long as the lady requires my services. But how long that may be I do not know. When she dismisses me, it will be an honour to be employed by the signor.”

“Very well, then, you must give me your name

and address," rejoined the Englishman, "that I may know how to get at you."

"Many thanks, signor. My name is Luigi Mondorlo, and I am always to be heard of at the English library in the Piazza di Spagna," said the man.

Mr. Lawry, for such was his name, drew forth his tablets, and wrote the address.

"But how comes it, my good fellow," he resumed, "that such a clever, well-informed valet-de-place as you are—for I followed you and your party one day round the Vatican—how comes it, I say, that you should sit here amusing yourself with that queer-looking little book, instead of attending the young lady round the Pantheon?"

The man laughed. "She has been here so often, signor, that she has heard all I have got to say about it, and would be as tired of hearing it all over again, I suppose, as I should be of saying it," he replied.

"What do you think makes her come here so often?" demanded Mr. Lawry.

"That is no business of mine," replied Luigi.

"Business? No, certainly. The answering such a question as mine has nothing very like

business in it. But unless she pays you, and well too, for holding your tongue, she cannot reasonably expect that you should stand for hours together waiting upon her pleasure, without speaking a word to any one that passes by. But perhaps she *does* pay you well for keeping her secrets. Have I guessed rightly?"

"No, indeed, you have not, sir," replied the man, yawning. "She does not seem much to care who knows of her goings on. I never saw her pretend to make the least mystery or concealment about any thing she does, except just putting down her veil as she goes in and comes out of the places."

"Well, to be sure, that is strange enough," returned Mr. Lawry; "for of course, by your manner of speaking, you know that there are some things she does that she would not very well like every body to know."

"Why, I have got no very good right to say so either," said the man, looking frankly up in the face of the questioner; "only, you know, that when a young lady is living in the way that of course she lives in, the gentlemen they depend upon would not, in the general way, quite like

that she should keep loitering about as this one does, in all the most quiet places. We don't want any conjurer to tell us how young ladies are amusing themselves when they do that."

"What is the name of the gentleman she lives with?" said Mr. Lawry.

"I know not, on my word," replied the conscientious valet. "And I do not know *her* name either. She pays me every week herself, and I bring her the receipt for the carriage and horses too, and the *buono mano* to the coachman she gives herself. But I never had any occasion to ask for her name, or for that of the gentleman either—and so I never did, for I don't love English names, they are so difficult."

"Then it is an English gentleman she lives with?" said Mr. Lawry.

"Why, that I take to be a matter of course, sir, from the quantity of money she throws away in little bronzes and marbles, the miniature copies, you know, sir, of our great works. We never see that in any ladies that don't live under the protection of English gentlemen."

"And pray, my good Mr. Luigi Mondorlo," said the young Englishman, with sudden anima-

tion, "how do you know that she lives with any gentleman at all?"

The man laughed. "How do I know it?" he repeated. "You are a good many years younger than I am, signor, there is no doubt of that, and yet I should have thought you were old enough to know that young ladies like my *padrona* do not wander about the churches, and galleries, and ruins, in the style she does, if they have any body to take care of them *except* the gentleman they live with, unless they are just married indeed, and don't choose to take any body about with them as yet. But that is not the case with my *padrona*, for the servants of the house always call her '*la signorina*.'"

"But how comes it that you have never asked these servants of the house any thing about her? If you had done this, you would not be driven to so much guess-work as you seem to be present."

"Ecco!" exclaimed the man, laughing, "that is quite an English question, signor. The Roman people never think of making any inquiries of that sort. A gentleman may ask a lady a question, or a lady may ask a gentleman, for the private and particular satisfaction of either party—that is,

provided they are not man and wife. But Rome would not be wide enough to contain its population, if such sort of questions as you suggest were to be set going among them. We are a peaceable people, signor, in these later days, whatever we might be formerly—peaceable in all ways; whether it be his Holiness or the Emperor that takes the government of the country upon him, or this noble gentleman, or that, takes the government of a lady, the wisest among the Romans look the other way, and say nothing.”

“That may be all very wise and very convenient for you,” replied the Englishman, condescendingly adopting the playful tone of the Italian, “but we manage all these matters very differently in our country.”

“It may be so, signor,” returned the valet-de-place, resuming his poetical studies. “But you will find, if you stay long enough among us, that we understand all about the ladies, at least quite as well as you do; and that my pretty *padrona* is just the sort of young lady I take her to be, notwithstanding her looking as shy and as pale as a nun.”

“I dare say you are right, my fine Roman,”

returned Lawry, chucking half a scudo at him ; and the young Englishman walked off, without a doubt in poor Bertha's favour remaining on his mind, but not without something like a sigh, that an English woman, and with such a pair of eyes too, should so early have placed herself beyond the reach even of a conjecture that might save her from condemnation.

CHAPTER VII.

MRS. ROBERTS now found herself in a vastly more magnificent circle than she had ever been before, and her elevation of mind kept pace with her elevation of position. In Paris, the joint stock establishment of the ladies Moreton and Forton had been the brightest star in the constellation, in which it was her glory to move about like a sort of vapour, occasionally catching and throwing back the rays that fell upon her. At Baden-Baden, she most assuredly made a gigantic step in advance; for there it was no reflected light that she gave back from the pre-eminent Balcony House, for the Lynberry and the Montgomery

might, in one sense at least, have signed themselves, like Hamlet, more hers than their own, and a princess, and no less, had been one of her daily and *almost* familiar associates. But the transition from Baden-Baden to Rome, was like darting from the firmament where the nearer stars seem to "inhabit heaven lax," into the bright vortex of the milky way. The two letters of introduction, together with the unshrinking display of personal attraction in the young ladies, the improving impudence and moustaches of their handsome brother, and the skilful restoration of all the silks and satins which the speculative spirit of their mother had collected for them all, produced a far greater splendour of success than any of them, even the eagle-hearted Agatha herself, had ever dreamed of.

Amidst the numerous and motley throng to which they were now admitted, there were some who had not much better right to take a place with princes than herself; and among these were a certain Mrs. and Miss Stapleford, in whose society Mrs. Roberts found great attraction, though the impossibility of discovering any thing Right Honourable in their lineage gave her an occasional

qualm of conscience, from feeling that the time wasted in their society might have been put to profit in wedging herself in among the magnificent-sounding titles which made sweet and now perpetual music in her ears on all sides. These scruples, however, were prevented from becoming any serious restraint upon the acquaintance, in consequence of her perceiving that, beyond the shadow of a doubt, Mrs. and Miss Stapleford knew a great many more princes and princesses than she did; and the question as to whether they might venture to permit the intimate tone assumed by these ladies to them (and to every body else), which was brought rather formally under discussion before the select committee formed by Mrs. Roberts, her daughters, and her son, was decided *nem. con.* in their favour. This important conversation terminated by the following remarks from the various parties engaged in it, all of which carried so much weight that no doubts were ever again suggested on the subject.

“There is no denying, you know, that let them be what they will themselves, the Staplefords are more really intimate with all the highest titles

here than any other people whatever, excepting just the first set among themselves: so at any rate there can be no danger of one's doing oneself harm by going on with them."

"That's quite true, isn't it, Edward?" demanded Maria, turning to her brother, who was, as usual, arranging his various capillary treasures to the best advantage before the looking-glass.

"True as gospel," he replied, with an expressive grimace, indicative of mixed terror and aversion; "if the girl were not so devilishly ugly, I should pass an hour in their drawing-room every day of my life. There is not a thing happens in Rome that the old one (I don't mean the devil, but the old woman)—there is nothing either said or done in Rome that she does not know, and it is monstrously convenient to have such a scandalous chronicler to keep one *au courant*. But I can't stand that Miss Barbara with her red nose and all her talents; but her red nose can't make any difference, you know, to you and the girls, and therefore I decidedly vote for your cultivating the acquaintance."

"The acquaintance will be cultivated, you may depend upon it, Edward; I will undertake that

on my own individual account. It is impossible to live in Rome without having access to Barbara Stapleford's caricatures."

These words, spoken in the authoritative voice of Agatha, were quite sufficient to decide the question, and what followed were mere desultory remarks, which could add nothing to the weight of what had been already uttered. Maria, for instance, asked Edward playfully, which he would rather flirt with for a whole evening, Miss Stapleford, or Bertha Harrington?

"Oh, Miss Stapleford, ten thousand times over!" he replied. "And yet, Maria," he added, with an expressive glance at his mother, "I fully intend that the detestable Bertha shall be Mrs. Edward Fitzherbert Roberts before the expiration of many weeks. You stare, girls; but I am quite in earnest, I promise you; so take care to provide yourselves with white satins, and all the rest of it."

The young ladies laughed, and their mamma chuckled, and then the family conclave was broken up—by the young man's going to meet a set of newly-made intimate friends, who had entered into a combination to take in the knowing ones at

the next races—by Maria's retiring to her sleeping and robing apartment, for the purpose of composing some new mask in which to entangle hearts in the evening—by Agatha's going to prepare for the carriage which was to convey her to the Princess Yabiolporakiosky—and by Mrs. Roberts setting off on foot to pay an early visit in the most sociable and uncereimonious manner possible to the Staplefords.

That Mrs. Roberts was admitted to them now, and at all other times and seasons whenever she presented herself, was solely owing to the wish and will of Miss Barbara. Mrs. Stapleford was a person, who though she ate, drank, and slept well and sufficiently, yet nevertheless seemed to live upon talking. At any rate, nobody acquainted with her could doubt that if this primal enjoyment were withdrawn from her, she must perish. As to her daughter, Mrs. Stapleford had long known that it was perfectly useless to attempt talking to her; the young lady had told her many years ago (Miss Barbara was thirty-three years old) that she never did, and never should hear a single word that was addressed to her while she was drawing; and as, when at home, she never

did any thing else, her mother found it necessary to provide herself with listeners among her friends and acquaintance; and fortunately this was by no means difficult, for Mrs. Stapleford took such incessant pains to obtain the very earliest information of every thing that was going on in Rome, from the Vatican to the diligence office, that a great many people, both ladies and gentlemen, liked to begin the day by listening to her, and it was doubtless owing to this luxurious plenitude of morning visitors that Mrs. Stapleford had by degrees grown a little, though not very fastidious; and being so, she felt that the vast mass of information she had to bestow, the invaluable *catalogue raisonné* of dresses, the unquestionable information she ever possessed of all the most important acts of legislation proceeding from the Propaganda, and the little hints of heavy scandals which she sprinkled as she went, like Cayenne pepper giving flavour and animation to a rich ragoût, altogether rendered her discourse worthy of more distinguished ears than those of Mrs. Roberts. But on this point the stedfast will of her daughter Barbara silenced all opposition. The life of this decidedly clever young lady was chiefly spent

in studying the features, expression, and attitudes of all her acquaintance, in sketching admirable caricature portraits of them, and for ever keeping awake the curiosity of the Roman world, by the most capricious showing and hiding that ever lady artist indulged in; which is saying a good deal both for the courage and the reserve of her exhibitions.

All who were at that time included in the motley mass which constituted the Anglo-Roman *beau monde*, became in succession the subjects of her often cruel, but always clever pencil; but though scarcely a single individual was entirely overlooked, the lady had her favourites, and there were some subjects to which she returned again and again, with ever increasing pleasure, and ever improving fidelity. The manner in which Mrs. Roberts inhaled, and sucked in, as it were, all her mother's long stories, had in it a sort of charm for her of which she never seemed to weary, and it was for this reason that she was never greeted with a "*non receve*," unless some still greater favourite, or some very particularly precious group, chanced to be in possession of the Stapleford boudoir.

Mrs. Roberts was assuredly very far from guessing the cause of this preference, but its value to her was enormous; a fact which may easily be made evident by giving a specimen of the conversation enjoyed by her during the visit of a single morning. The preceding evening, or rather night, had been passed by all the world at a ball given by one of the few Roman princes who still retain their state and revenues unimpaired. It had been crowded and magnificent, and kept up to so late an hour, as to have been considered altogether the most delightful *fête* that had been given that year.

“Yes, ma’am, it was quite perfect,” said Mrs. Stapleford, in reply to a speech of Mrs. Roberts, expressive of her admiration. “Nobody knows how to do these things like the Orinis. But yet it is a pity too, ma’am, isn’t it, to see such abominable goings on as we witnessed last night! Did you ever see any thing like it in your life?”

Miss Barbara gave one glance at the features of the visitor as this question was asked, and her pencil moved with the quick, sure, eager vivacity of inspiration.

“Dear me!” replied Mrs. Roberts, literally

trembling with eagerness, "I was so taken up with my daughters, and being introduced to all the gentlemen that wanted to dance with them, that I really do not believe I saw what you allude to, and I should be greatly obliged if you would have the great kindness to tell me about it. It will be quite a charity, you know, my dear Mrs. Stapleford, for it is such a great disadvantage for the mother of a family not to know a little what is going on."

"You are quite right there, ma'am," returned Mrs. Stapleford, "I don't know any thing more dangerous than going about everywhere as you do, and taking girls too, without knowing, as you say, what's going on. I am sure I would not refuse the worst enemy I have, if he asked the same thing of me."

"Indeed, Mrs. Stapleford, you are very, *very* kind," returned Mrs. Roberts, her countenance glowing with affectionate gratitude; "I do assure you that you will be doing me a great deal of real service, for it is quite dangerous not to know who one ought to speak to, and who one ought not."

"Oh, as to speaking and not speaking, that is

rather an old-fashioned notion, ma'am. However, that doesn't signify. What I was alluding to was the spick-and-span new flirtation which the Princess Bornorino is getting up with that poor silly boy, Belvolto."

"With whom, ma'am?" said Mrs. Roberts, staring.

"The Duke de Belvolto," returned Mrs. Stapleford, taking a large pinch of snuff.

It was a good while since Mrs. Roberts had felt herself more completely aware of her own rapid elevation than at that moment. It *was* delightful to hear a person with whom she was so very intimate call a duke a "poor silly boy." But she felt that she owed it to herself, and to her station in society, to take the same tone, and she exclaimed with a sigh, "Poor fellow!"

"Poor fellow, indeed! I have no patience with him," returned her friend. "There was the poor dear Princess Marianne looking as white as a sheet."

"Was she indeed?" returned Mrs. Roberts, not choosing to confess her total ignorance as to the person meant; the only Princess Marianne she had ever heard of being the wife of an accom-

plished gentleman, who appeared greatly devoted to her.

“I don’t know where your eyes could have been, ma’am, if you did not see that,” returned Mrs. Stapleford. “I saw two ladies offer her their smelling bottles, and her dear kind husband, who really is the best creature in the world, brought her a chair, took her fan out of her hand and fanned her, standing carefully all the time, dear good soul! so as to prevent her seeing Belvolto and the Bornorino. I am sure I don’t wonder at the Countess Sophia’s doating upon that man as she does; he really deserves it. So full of feeling and delicacy!”

Poor Mrs. Roberts! Never had she felt herself so deplorably behind-hand; and had a Society for the Propagation of Useful Knowledge been established at Rome, and her opinion asked as to who should be made president, she would have vociferated the name of Mrs. Stapleford with the whole strength of her lungs.

Deeply thankful, however, as she felt for the sort of special providence which seemed to have thrown her into the society of this highly-informed individual, she was greatly at a loss how

best to profit by it. The argument about proving herself unknown, though perhaps not so familiarly known to her as a poetical saw as it may be to some others, was nevertheless impressed upon her mind as cogently, by the unassisted force of her own sagacity; and she by no means liked to place herself in the category of the excluded ignorant, and who know not *that* which was of *salon* notoriety to all admitted within the magic circle of "*the society of Rome.*" Ten thousand times rather would she have been suspected of not knowing whether the sun went round the earth, or the earth round the sun, than be supposed more ignorant than other people concerning the intrigues going on around her.

Was she then to remain ignorant in order to avoid appearing so? Oh no! for her dear children's sake she would risk everything rather than suffer them again to enter a ball-room without understanding better than they did at present, dear creatures! what was the real meaning of the most interesting occurrence they were likely to witness there. But though resolutely determined to learn all she could, let it cost what it might from the humiliating confession of ignorance, she

exerted all her skill to avoid exposure as much as possible.

“How much more interesting society must be to you, my dear Mrs. Stapleford,” she said, “than to those who have not known the individuals who compose it so long as you have done!”

“Long?” returned Mrs. Stapleford. “Bless you, ma’am, I have not known the most amusing part of them long. Most of the people here come and go like the figures in a magic lantern. But of course one can’t live intimately among them at all without finding out what they are about. The Princess Bornorino, for instance, who made herself so abominably conspicuous last night with the Belvolto, has not been here for above two months this year, and it is four years ago since her last visit, and then she almost shut herself up excepting just for the best balls, in order to enjoy the society of Count Romofkin; and she would have seen little enough of him if she had not, poor thing! for Romofkin spent his life in smoking.”

“She seems to have managed very well, however, with all these little affairs” (Mrs. Roberts had already learned to speak with moderation and dis-

cretion on all such subjects) "for we meet her everywhere."

"Meet her everywhere? To be sure you do," returned Mrs. Stapleford, staring at her with a look of great astonishment.

"And always in the very best set," added Mrs. Roberts, gaily.

"Always in the best set! Good gracious, to be sure you do," rejoined Mrs. Stapleford, "what *do* you mean, ma'am?"

"Oh! merely, you know, that all the very best people seem always more intimate with the Princess Bornorino than with almost any one else; and that shows, does it not, that nobody thinks the worse of her for having so many lovers?"

"Think the worse of her! Oh dear!" and here Mrs. Stapleford laughed a funny little laugh, and took a very large pinch of snuff.

"Mrs. Roberts was greatly vexed. She saw at once that she did not stand high in the estimation of her companion as a woman of fashion—but she boldly resolved not to desert herself at this trying moment, and said with a very respectable degree of ease, "I was only alluding to what you said about her conduct being abominable last night."

“ And so it was abominable, ma'am. You don't suppose I mean to defend her for having turned off at a moment's warning the Duke di Torno, whom every one allows to be one of the most admirable people in Rome, in order to turn the head of the Belvolto, who is devoted, as every body knows, to the Princess Marianne Contorina? Besides, the whole thing was done in so abominable a manner, without the slightest consideration for Marianne, or a shadow of proper feeling towards Di Torno. It is quite too bad. I am excessively angry with her, and so I shall tell her, you may depend upon it. She bears everything from me; but as to your fancying, my poor dear lady! that people are to leave off speaking to her, that's quite a mistake, and won't do at all, I assure you. But it is very likely, I think, that you don't exactly understand how completely the Bornorino is the fashion. You have a great loss, ma'am, in not being acquainted with her.”

“ I am sure, my dear Mrs. Stapleford, it is not my fault,” replied Mrs. Roberts. “ There is nothing in the whole world I should like so much as being introduced to her; and my daughters, too, would be delighted to cultivate her acquaintance.”

“Well, ma’am,” returned the obliging Mrs. Stapleford, “I shall have no objection to introduce, if I should happen to have an opportunity. She is going to give a fancy ball during the carnival, and I dare say she would like to have your girls very well.”

“A thousand and a thousand thanks; my dearest Mrs. Stapleford,” returned the happy mother, in an ecstasy of gratitude. “You may depend upon it we shall make an opportunity. But here comes a whole party of ladies—I really must make way for them—good bye, good bye—don’t get up, pray! I dare not say good bye to Miss Barbara, for fear of interrupting her. What a wonderful clever creature she is, Mrs. Stapleford! How I do wish she would let me see her drawing some day!”

“I will show you one now if you like it,” said Miss Stapleford, turning towards her the paper on which she had been occupied.

“Dear me! how like your mamma that is! But who is the other person? A fancy figure, I suppose. What very long ears you have given her, my dear! There is some fun about it, I dare say, but I never saw any body like it, so I can’t find it out.”

Mrs. Roberts then took her leave, and walked home again to her lodgings, where she impatiently awaited the return of her daughters, neither of them being at home ; her whole soul so full of all she had heard, as well as of the promised introduction, that it was exceedingly painful to her to be obliged to sit down and sew in silence.

CHAPTER VIII.

MANY weeks passed away without producing any great change or material variety in the state of affairs as already described. Bertha Harrington had become better acquainted with Rome than one traveller in ten thousand, and the Robertses were running the race that so many of the same species have run before them. The difference between the one mode of life and the other was certainly very great, considering that the parties inhabited the same domicile, and were members of the same family. Another difference between them arose from the fact, that every day which passed added to Bertha's wish for the arrival of

her cousin, whose letters were much shorter and much less frequent than she had expected ; while every day rendered both the tender Maria and the high-minded Agatha more resigned to the prolonged absence of the two gentlemen with whom he was associated.

The even tenor of Miss Harrington's life was, however, at length varied by an adventure, and a very startling one. The religious feelings which had been impressed on the mind of this young girl by her excellent mother, were equally simple and sincere. Never, perhaps, were prayers uttered with more purity of spirit or more undoubting faith than those daily breathed by her in the solitude of her chamber, and at the weekly assembling of her tacitly tolerated fellow-worshippers outside the gates of Rome. But in these days of speculative devotion, when all men, all women, and almost all children, seemed called upon to decide upon contested points of doctrine and discipline, the quiet, deeply-fixed piety of Bertha, though most truly it had grown with her growth, and strengthened with her strength, might have been mistaken by superficial observers as being indicative of more indifference than zeal. But they would

have been mistaken. The first feelings which were awakened in her on looking about her at Rome, were those connected with an instinctive and almost passionate love for the fine arts, and the fresh impressions left by the eager perusal of history, which had made a prominent feature in her education. But it was not long before the religious aspect of Rome, as displayed to the eyes of even the most careless observer, attracted her attention. The prodigious number of churches, the astounding splendour of some among them, and the multitudes of priests which thronged the streets, produced a sensation of awe, mingled with curiosity. Young as she was, however, Bertha Harrington was not one of those persons who are in danger of changing either the faith or the form of the religion which, from their earliest days of consciousness, has been the object of their deepest reverence, by looking at the pompous prelacy of Rome. She was made of other stuff. But she was interested greatly in watching the external worship of the church from which her own had seceded; and with the most innocent unconsciousness of deciding for herself a point of such importance as to shake the tranquillity of man for

ages past and ages yet to come, she thanked God very fervently for having been born in England. But still there was one feature of Romanism which had taken strong hold of her imagination. She thought there was something very delightful in the idea of a society of women withdrawing themselves from the idle vanities of life, and devoting themselves to holy thoughts and deeds of charity. And such a notion of the state and occupation of a sisterhood of cloistered nuns, though perhaps not exactly accordant with truth, must not be sneered at as a proof of folly in my Bertha, for most assuredly it is that which most naturally suggests itself to an uncorrupted female mind upon considering the subject. But be this as it may, Bertha certainly did feel a great deal of interest about convents and nuns; and one of the injunctions given to Luigi Mondorlo was, that he should do all he could to get her admitted within their walls, and enabled to witness their most interesting ceremonies. This was one of the many powers upon which Luigi particularly prided himself. He had a sister who was a nun; and this, as he now declared to Bertha, and had often declared to other of his lady employers

before, gave him greater facilities in gratifying all their wishes as to nuns and convents than were possessed by any other valet-de-place in Rome.

The adventure of Bertha which has been alluded to, arose from this curiosity on her part, and the not quite vainly boasted power of gratifying it on his.

He had long promised to obtain for her an especially favourable place for seeing a lady receive the white veil, and on this occasion at least he kept his word faithfully, for having informed his holy sister that a young English lady, extremely rich and perfectly independent, had fixed her heart upon knowing all about it, and that he thought it very likely indeed that one day or other she would turn nun herself, permission was obtained from the abbess for her admission into the interior of the convent on the day appointed for the ceremony. Greatly to her satisfaction, therefore, she was conducted into the parlour where the nuns were permitted to stand on one side of a grated aperture, and converse with such friends as were licensed to visit them, who were stationed on the other. Bertha modestly seated herself as near this grating as she conveniently could, without

interfering with the approach of the visitors, who each in succession were permitted to hold a few minutes' conversation with some near relative or connexion within the cloister.

Several pair of fine black eyes, seen by no means to a disadvantage under the white band that crossed the forehead, had more or less interested Bertha, according to their beauty or their expression, when a figure approached the grating, whose dress, though almost equally monastic with that of the sisters who had preceded her, was without the speaking accompaniment of the veil. This difference in her attire so much attracted the attention of Bertha, that for a moment she did not look at her features; but when, that moment being past, she looked in her face, she suddenly lost all command of herself, started from her chair, and uttered a loud scream. And another moment made it evident to the startled females on both sides of the grating, that the individual who had caused this vehement emotion shared it also. She uttered a deep groan, took a faltering step or two backwards from the grating, and fell fainting into the arms of the sisters who were crowding the space behind her.

Some of the ladies who occupied the parlour approached the pale and trembling Bertha, offered her numerous smelling bottles, and presently obtained for her a glass of water. Their attention produced the desired effect, the cheeks and lips of Bertha resumed their natural colour, and she recovered herself sufficiently to thank them, and to say, that if her carriage was in waiting she would wish to return home immediately, as the unexpected sight of a person whom she had known under very painful circumstances, had disturbed her spirits too much to permit her looking at the ceremony about to take place with the interest it deserved.

But upon inquiry, it was found that her carriage was not in waiting, nor her valet-de-place either, so that she was obliged to exert herself still further, and submit to the disagreeable necessity of accompanying the rest of the party to the chapel of the convent, which they entered by a private door, notice being given that the ceremony was about to begin.

A scene of great confusion, meanwhile, was going on in the interior of the convent. The novice, whose features had so painfully affected the

unfortunate Bertha, was conveyed to her cell in a state of insensibility, from which she was not restored till after long and repeated applications of the strongest remedies that the terrified sisters could apply; and when at length she recovered her senses, their troubles were by no means at an end, for she began almost clamorously to demand the attendance of a confessor. At any other time such a requisition from an inmate of that house suffering under affliction either of body or mind, would have met with immediate compliance, but now there was great difficulty, great demur.

“There are but just enough to do the service of the altar handsomely,” said the stately Sister Eugenie, knitting her brows; “and what will the lord cardinal think if the convent of the Santa Consolazione cannot command a proper attendance of officiating priests on such an occasion as this?”

“I must, I must,” exclaimed the novice, vehemently. “The loss of my soul will rest as an eternal burden upon yours, if you refuse me a confessor. I must—I must confess, and instantly, or it may be too late.”

Persuaded from this last phrase that the novice

believed herself to be dying, a feeling of terror took possession of those around her, lest indeed the last offices of the church should be denied her through their negligence or indifference. Even Sister Eugenie allowed that this was not a moment to stand upon ceremony, even though that ceremony concerned the splendour of the service about to be performed before the altar of *La Santa Consolazione*.

“Let Father Maurizio be brought hither instantly,” she said; “he will be still in the sacristy. Sister Clara,” she added, addressing one of the elder females, “go you and see to it. It is a moment of peril when a house like this is open, even for this holiest of offices.”

The summons thus sanctioned was immediately conveyed to Father Maurizio, who obeyed it without a moment's delay, for he was told that a dying novice required his aid. The holy sisters, who, notwithstanding the strong temptation to enter the gallery of their chapel, still continued in attendance at the bedside of the novice, all reverently left the room when the priest entered, and the confessor and his penitent were left alone.

The confession was not a short one; and when

it was over, two or three of the good nuns, who still resisted their longing desire to enter the chapel, that they might attend their suffering sister in her hour of need, entered her cell, and found her, though certainly not in danger of immediate death, extremely pale, and still trembling violently from the agitation it was evident she had undergone.

The ceremony in the chapel, meanwhile, was proceeding with becoming pomp and solemnity; and even Bertha, though still suffering from the unexpected shock of seeing a person whom she had hoped never to behold again, forgot for a moment her own sorrows and sufferings as she gazed at the delicate-looking young creature, who had found strength to renounce all that this world has to offer of lovely, loving, and beloved, in the hope of obtaining a reward for the sacrifice in another.

The exhortation pronounced, and the tremendous ceremony ended, the newly-made nun retired through a door that opened on one side of the altar, into the convent, where she was to find all that was left to her of earth; and the company who had witnessed it began to disperse. Bertha too well knew the punctuality of Luigi to feel

any doubt as to finding her carriage in attendance at the door of the church; and thankful that she should so soon be restored to the solitude for which she was longing, she was anxiously endeavouring to make her way through the crowd, when she felt her arm gently touched by a hand that evidently had not come in contact with it by accident. She looked round, and saw an elderly man in the dress of a Romish ecclesiastic, but not in his clerical vestments, who immediately addressed her in French, requesting that she would have the kindness to remain in the chapel for a few minutes, as he had a communication of great importance to make to her.

“To me, sir,” she said, turning extremely pale. “Can it be from her?—Is it possible that she should seek any communication with me?”

“Your conjecture is evidently right, Miss Harrington,” replied the priest. “You suppose that it is the unhappy Mathilde Labarre who has sent me to you, and you are not mistaken.”

“Sir, sir, I cannot see her, indeed I cannot,” cried Bertha, earnestly, though suffering herself to be led, or rather guided, by the priest, whose hand still rested on her arm, into the sacristy.

"You cannot know—she cannot have told you, all the misery she has caused me. Oh, sir, for pity's sake, never let me look upon her more!"

"Pardon me, young lady, she has told me all," replied Father Maurice, "and I can too well understand your natural unwillingness to see her, to attempt persuading you to overcome it; nor will it be necessary for the attainment of the very proper object that she had in view in giving me the commission which I am now executing. Sit down, Miss Harrington," continued the old man, kindly, as he set a chair for her.

"Though it will be less terrible for you to listen to me than to her, I am quite aware that the discussion cannot be entered upon at all, without causing you great agitation, great suffering."

"I will hear every thing that you shall tell me it is necessary I should hear," replied Bertha, touched by the tone of genuine compassion in which the old man addressed her, "I will hear every thing, if you will only promise me that I shall not see her."

"I do promise you, Miss Harrington," he replied, "and in return, you must promise me, that excepting to your father, you will never repeat

what I am now about to disclose. It was confided to me in all the sacred security of confession, and it is only permitted to reach you in the hope that it may tend to console you under your heavy affliction."

"Console me?" repeated Bertha, with a shudder.

"Yes, Miss Harrington," replied the priest, "if all this unhappy woman has revealed to me be as true as I suppose it to be, you will find consolation—oh, great and lasting consolation—from what it is in my power to tell you. Will you give me the promise I require?"

"I will, sir," replied Bertha, solemnly. "I do promise you."

"You promise me, never to reveal the circumstances I am going to state, except to your father," said the priest.

"I wish not to make any exception," returned Bertha, a crimson flush colouring her pale cheeks for a moment, and then leaving them apparently paler than before.

"You will thank me for the exception ere we part," said Father Maurice, looking at her kindly; "and charged with this condition, I again ask if you give me your promise?"

"I do," said Bertha.

"Let me spare you," resumed the priest, "all unnecessary minuteness of reference to the dreadful scenes which preceded your departure from your father's house. You were, and are, very young, to form such horrible conjectures respecting the origin of all you have endured, as I cannot but believe, from your agitation at the encounter with this guilty woman, you have done. You suspect Mathilde Labarre poisoned your mother?"

"Her maid suspected it, and she told me," said Bertha, speaking with difficulty.

"My miserable penitent supposed it ~~was~~ so," resumed Father Maurice; "but she supposed also that she was not the only person suspected by the maid—she supposed—"

Bertha uttered a faint shriek, and raised her hand as if to forbid his going further.

"Oh, speak it not!" she cried. "Have pity on me! Let me go—let me go, and hide myself from every body."

The old priest looked at her with an eye that spoke no want of feeling.

"Do not believe," he replied, "that I would

have detained you here for the sole purpose of reviving feelings, which have made your young cheek, my daughter, paler than it ought to be. That a fearful crime has been committed, has been rightly guessed; but bless the mercy of God, which permits you to know that your surviving parent had no share in it. Of great and grievous sins your unhappy father has been guilty, but of this he is as innocent as you are."

"Thank God!" cried Bertha, sinking on her knees, and raising her clasped hands to heaven. "Oh, praised and blessed be the Father of all mercy, that has taken this frightful weight from my heart! And you, a stranger, how can I ever thank you as I ought!" And here poor Bertha burst into a salutary flood of tears, of which every drop that fell seemed to give her relief.

The good Father Maurice proved his sympathy, by letting them flow without interruption, but in truth, it was partly that he might remove the drops from his own eyes, that he turned from her so completely; and when he again approached, and offered his hand to raise her, she looked at him with a feeling of affectionate gratitude that could not be mistaken.

“Sit down for a moment, my dear child,” he said, replacing her in the chair she had before occupied, “and tell me if you would wish that I should communicate any further particulars of her confession? She has given me unrestricted permission to tell you all; and may the earnestness of her wish to relieve your mind from the dreadful suspicion which she herself endeavoured to throw upon your father, together with the heavy penance she is to undergo,” he added, crossing himself, “may it assist in reconciling her soul to God! Tell me, my poor child, have you strength to listen to any further details?”

Bertha paused for a moment ere she replied. Her heart sank within her at the idea of hearing any voice dwelling upon the dreadful theme which she had so often prayed, in secret and in silence, might be permitted by Heaven to pass from her memory as a dream—and as a delirious dream she had almost taught herself to believe it.

There was a sort of filial impiety in suffering her mind to rest on the suspicions which the unguarded words of her mother’s maid had awakened, that made her feel this effort to forget, or rather to render vague and uncertain, all that

occurred on the dreadful night of her mother's death, as an imperious duty; and much of the eagerness with which she pursued every occupation that had power to interest her mind arose from this. But still there lay at the bottom of her heart, though resolutely guarded from every voluntary movement of recollection, a dark and heavy load, which the words of the friendly confessor had removed in a degree that had, comparatively speaking, restored her to happiness; and for a moment she was tempted to say, "No! no! name it not again! It is past, it is gone, it is over! Oh, never let it come to me again!"

But before the words were spoken, she remembered how utterly alone she was—how totally beyond the reach of learning any thing that might enable her to decide upon what she ought to do. Her position relative to her father was now completely changed. Not only had she in her secret thoughts accused him of having participated in the horrid crime which had deprived her of a mother, but she fully believed that his hateful paramour was still his companion; and earnestly as she had laboured to drive all such thoughts from her mind, had been living under the tortur-

ing conviction that her mother's honoured place was usurped by her murderer. This it was which had made her endure the uncongenial home upon which she had been cast; and the idea that any remonstrance to her aunt against it might lead to her being recalled to Castle Harrington, would have sufficed to chain her to it for ever. But now every thing was changed—new duties seemed to arise before her eyes; but before she could take any step towards performing them, it was necessary that she should still learn much which it was possible the revelations of the repentant novice might have disclosed. Almost desperately, therefore, she resolved to hear all that the kind priest had to say, and again fervently thanking him for his goodness to her, she declared her wish to hear all that he thought it desirable she should know.

“You have decided wisely, my daughter,” he replied. “Painful as the theme must be, it is better that you lose not this opportunity of learning facts which probably may have an important influence on your future conduct. And yet it may not be needful, my dear young lady, that I should repeat to you at length all the disclosures

of this unhappy woman. Unhappily you must already be aware that a sinful connexion existed between her and your father. But deeply as this is to be deplored on his account, it is but just to tell you that the guilty confession to which I have been listening clearly proves that all the most appalling features of the crime belonged to Mathilde Labarre. She states that her principal reason for taking the situation of your governess, was the knowledge she had obtained of your unfortunate father's propensity to gallantry; that she soon obtained great influence over him, and flattering herself that it was much greater than she afterwards found it, she conceived the horrible scheme of removing your honoured mother, in the hope of being installed as the lawful mistress of the castle in her place. The first movement of your father's mind on learning the dreadful catastrophe was to prevent the disclosure of Mademoiselle Labarre's guilt. He might perhaps have been awake, even at that dreadful moment, to the probability that suspicion might fall upon himself. But be this as it may, it is evident that he did all he could, and very skilfully too, to dissipate the suspicions which this sudden death

occasioned. In this, it seems, he was quite successful—which, as she truly says, could not have been the case if he had been guilty of the imprudence of immediately parting with her. In a paroxysm of terror that seems to have seized upon her after the fatal catastrophe, she left the castle, but was brought back to it by your father, who enforced her remaining there for some weeks; but nothing, by her own account, could be more hostile than the terms on which they lived during this interval. His horror and detestation of the deed she had committed seemed to have rendered her presence a punishment almost proportioned to the sins of which he had been guilty; and she confesses that her first feelings of repentance arose from witnessing the passionate grief with which your father mourned for the wife he had injured and lost. May this repentance avail!” added the priest, crossing himself, “but the death of your mother is not the only one that lies upon her soul. The only person whose evidence she had cause to fear was the personal attendant of the unfortunate lady, and to this poor woman she administered repeated doses of a slow but subtle poison, which gradually paralysed her limbs, and,

ere long, produced her death. I really believe that it is now only for your father's sake that she wishes the whole of this terrible history to be buried in eternal oblivion ; and she wished this last atrocious act to be communicated to you, that you may be aware of the importance of any indiscretion on your part, as no disclosure can be feared from any other quarter."

"Even without the promise given, it would be buried safely with me," replied Bertha, solemnly. "But can you tell me, sir, if you gathered from any thing she said, the motive of my unhappy father for keeping me thus estranged from my home?"

"Yes, Miss Harrington," answered Father Maurice, "I can answer that question distinctly. Your being sent off in the first instance was the natural result of the overwhelming horror in which he found himself plunged, and from which it was his first object to withdraw you ; and I suspect that your not being recalled, arises from a want of courage on the part of your father, who dreads to see the child he has rendered motherless by his infidelity, though not by his hand."

"And must we then remain estranged for ever?" said Bertha, mournfully.

"I scarcely perhaps know enough to be a proper adviser," replied the good man, "but it seems to me that you would best perform your duty, young lady, by returning to him. Mademoiselle Labarre stated her belief that one source of the misery in which she saw him plunged arose from the idea that you might implicate him in the fearful crime that has rendered you both so desolate; and if this be so, the power of removing this agonizing idea from his mind is reason sufficient to induce you to go to him, without thinking of any other; though there may be many."

"I will go to him," said Bertha, rising with sudden energy: "you are right, good father. I feel it at my heart, and that shall guide me. I have trusted to my poor head hitherto, and now it seems to me as if I had acted very ill. Alas! alas! my father must indeed be wretched! May Heaven pardon me for having judged him wrongly!"

"Atone for it, my child, by breathing to his ear, and to his alone, the solemn secret of this day's confession. Go then, and may the God who watches over all his creatures with a father's pitying eye, protect and sustain you!"

Once more Bertha uttered an earnest assurance of her deep gratitude, and departed from the church, her carriage and her wondering servants having long been waiting for her at its door.

CHAPTER IX.

DEEPLY now had Bertha cause to deplore the thoughtless expenses in which she had indulged herself since her arrival at Rome. Bronze copies after the antique, if they are in a good style of workmanship, cost a good deal, and so, too, do mosaics, and well-cut intaglio imitations of first-rate gems ; and in all these little gauds and toys she had indulged herself so freely, that the second remittance of her increased allowance was so nearly gone, as to leave her with very little more than sufficient to pay for her carriage and servants for the current months.

Had she possessed the means of paying for her

journey, she would have set off the very hour her accomplished Luigi could have obtained her a passport and so forth *en règle* ; but this was now impossible, and notwithstanding the inexpressible consolation afforded by the information she had received, she felt a miserable restlessness from her enforced continuance at Rome, which made her look forward either to the arrival of her cousin or of her next remittance with feverish impatience. She felt, indeed, that she should find some difficulty in explaining to Vincent the cause of her sudden determination to return ; the impossibility of her doing so having been again and again the theme of lamentation in her conversations with him. But this was nothing compared to the agony of being thus kept from atoning for her involuntary fault, and of bestowing on her suffering and contrite father the best, perhaps the only consolation, the world had left for him. Her increased allowance had hitherto been carelessly received, and without inspiring the slightest sensation of gratitude. But now she seemed to feel that her unhappy parent did all he dared to do towards contributing to her comfort, and proving that his thoughts were with her. But Vincent came not,

and two months had still to wear themselves away before she could act upon the resolution she had taken.

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Perhaps it may be said of adventures as of sorrows, when they come,

“They come not single spies, but in battalions.”

Plots were certainly thickening round Bertha, nor were the Roberts family beyond the reach of rather startling vicissitudes.

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“I give you notice, ma’am,” said Mr. Edward Roberts, rushing into his mother’s bed-room in rather an uncereemonious style, “I give you fair notice that preaching won’t do for me now; so don’t try, if you please. I don’t suppose you have the power, have you, of accommodating me with three hundred pounds?”

“Three hundred fiddle-sticks, Edward! What joke are you upon now?” returned his mother, who was in excellent spirits, having just received an invitation to an ambassadorial ball.

“Joke, mother? You will find soon enough

that it is no joke, I promise you. I have lost bets to the amount of three hundred pounds; and it is no good for me to give my I. O. U. for them, unless I am sure of being able to take them up. Can you, or can you not, get this money for me?"

"Most certainly, Edward, I cannot," replied his mother, in considerable agitation. "Your poor father is, no doubt, getting more twaddling and imbecile every day. But this would rouse him to fresh life and opposition, you may depend upon it. We should not only fail of getting such a sum as that, but, take my word for it, we should have him getting troublesome again about every shilling we wanted."

"Then my last race is run, mother!" replied her son. "I must shoot myself."

"Nonsense, Edward! How can you be so wicked as to try to frighten me by talking such *rhodomontade*? I don't see any thing at all just at present that can justify us in being out of spirits. Only see the fuss that Theresa Yabiolporakiosky makes with Agatha! I am quite sure she might go and live with her any day. And as to Maria, who really grows handsomer every day, I will ask you

to tell me who there is in Rome that Prince Frederigo Paulovino appears to care about, excepting herself? It is impossible not to see it. The thing is as clear as light. Can you deny this, Edward?"

"Oh dear no, ma'am. The thing is very evident indeed—only you know the prince is unfortunately married, and therefore there is no hope from that quarter that our beauty should be transmogrified into La Princesse Maria. This is unlucky, you see."

"Not at all unlucky. You really speak as if you had left England and your leading-strings yesterday. I never said that I expected to see her made Princess Maria Paulovino. I am not so wicked as to wish for any one's death. But it is her success I am talking of—the high fashion that you must perceive she is in, if you are not turned blind with your odious betting. It is *that* I am talking of, Edward, and it is that which I am alluding to when I say that her prospects are good."

"Well, mother, so much the better for her," returned the young man. "But if you know what's what, enough to understand the sort of con-

dition I am in at present, you would not think my prospects very good, I promise you. So I will beg you to stop short, ma'am, if you please, in your crowings about your daughters, and recollect that you are now, perhaps, looking at your son for the last time."

"How very silly it is of you, Edward, to try to bully me in this way by threatening to blow your brains out! How can you think I am such a goose as to believe you?" returned his mother, with a tone and manner which proved she had profited a good deal by past experience. "Perhaps it will do you good to hear that we are invited to the ball that people were talking of last night at the —— ambassador's?"

But Mrs. Roberts was considerably alarmed when she saw the lips of her handsome son become suddenly white, while he stamped his foot vehemently on the floor, as he replied, "By Heaven, madam, this is no laughing matter. The man I owe the money to is Prince Frederigo; and if you have a grain of common sense left, you may guess, without my telling you, the sort of reception I should be likely to meet at the ball you talk of, if I appear there with my bets

unpaid. It is very likely you may enjoy the satisfaction of seeing Maria in the very tenderest of all possible flirtations on one side, and Miss Agatha on the arm of her Princess on the other, showing her admirable tact by not hearing a word of what is murmured from a moustache into her highness's off ear. All this is very likely, and may, as you say, promise well. But you will see ME looked at from head to foot by the high mightiness who is making love to my sister, in a style that will be perfectly well understood by the knowing ones to mean, 'I intend to kick you young sir, at the first convenient opportunity.' And kick me he will, ma'am, you may depend upon it, notwithstanding his tender passion for my sister."

"It is always, or almost always, easy to see when a man is in earnest, and Mrs. Roberts plainly saw that her son was in earnest now. She did not indeed believe that he had any very serious thoughts of shooting himself, but she saw plainly enough that the high place in society, of which she had just been boasting, must inevitably be endangered if her son exposed himself to such a meeting as he described. Instead of replying to

him in the same light tone she had used before, she remained for some moments silent; and when at length she spoke, it was in a manner that showed she was quite as much in earnest as himself.

“I doubt, Edward,” said she, “if you are at all aware of the great difficulties—nay, it may be the utter ruin, in which your unthinking folly is likely to plunge us. If you think, my son, that you and your sisters can be taken from a small faded house in Baker street, where we thought ourselves lucky if we could catch the wife of a knight, that we might delight our ears by the sound of ‘her ladyship,’—if you think that you can all be taken from such a home as that, and thrown into the greatest intimacy with princes and dukes, princesses and duchesses, without some difficulty, you are mistaken. I have done a good deal for you all (and this I believe nobody will deny) in contriving to do this with no greater expense in the way of lodgings than what we pay here. Nobody can say that I have ever indulged my pride by inviting a single creature to visit us here, except just leaving cards in a morning. Have I spent a single farthing upon giving any one even a cup of tea?

Have I not managed to get you all received night after night into all the finest drawing-rooms in Rome, without ever dreaming of giving any parties in return? Who is there, then, that can reproach me with extravagance or bad management? But yet, Edward, all this cannot be done for nothing—you know it can't—you know what your own dress has cost, and you may guess, then, mine and your sisters cannot have been a great deal less. This and the carriage, and the being obliged to have something like a regular dinner every day on account of Miss Harrington, has obliged me to push your father to the very utmost for money. And to tell you the truth at once, Edward, I don't think he has lost his faculties enough—though he does, poor man, drink brandy-and-water every night—to make him draw a check for three hundred pound more of capital, without more fuss and difficulty than I know how to stand; therefore, if you please, you must ask him for the money yourself."

Her son, who, during the whole of this long speech, had sat with his arms on the table, and his face resting upon them, now looked up

with a desperate sort of wildness in his eyes, that certainly did frighten his mother considerably; and when he spoke, there was nothing either in his words or manner to comfort her.

"This is your answer, ma'am, is it?" he said, with a sort of unnatural quietness. Then I will wish you good morning," and he rose from his seat as he spoke.

"Stay, Edward," said she, laying her hand on his arm, and almost forcing him to sit down again. "Stay, my dear boy. I have told you nothing but the truth as to the hopelessness of getting such a sum of money from your father just at present, without such a scene as it would be much better to avoid. But that is no reason why you should leave me in this way, without a word of consultation upon any other way of getting out of the scrape."

"Consultation! Words won't pay debts, ma'am. I hate talking when no good can come of it," said the young man, gloomily.

"But good may come of it, Edward," she replied. "Do tell me," she added, lowering her voice to a whisper, "do tell me, *when* do you propose to put your plan in execution about

marrying Bertha? You have not given it up, have you?"

"What has that to do with what we are now talking about? If I marry the girl to-day, can she give me three hundred pounds to-morrow?" replied the young man, impatiently.

"I don't know about to-morrow—but it would not be very long first, depend upon it. Besides, Edward, if you would but leave off frowning so savagely, and let us set our wits to work together as to how things might be managed, I think it is very likely we might hit upon something or other that might help to get you through your difficulties—great as, I must say, you have managed to make them."

"I will not be reproached, ma'am," said her son, with a good deal of vehemence. "*That* I will not bear, and it is as well to tell you so at once."

"I don't mean to reproach you, my dear boy. I vow and declare that I had no such idea in my thoughts. Quite the contrary, Edward. What I was thinking of, my dear, was this. I know all about debts of honour, remember, and that they must always be paid almost directly, and all that; but yet I think that with your clever-

ness, and my cleverness to help you, something might be done to gain a little time—only a very little, remember.”

“Impossible, ma’am! Don’t delude yourself with any such nonsense.”

“Well! but only just hear me, Edward. Of course, my dear, you must not attempt to pass it over, even for a day, as if you had forgotten it. I know all that just as well as you do,” said Mrs. Roberts, nodding her head with a satisfactory degree of intelligence. “On the contrary, Edward, I would not have you lose an hour, or hardly a moment, excepting to hear what I have got to say, before you go to Prince Frederigo. If you don’t find him at home, leave your card with a message, or a little scrap of paper that you can have ready written, which would show at once that you have no intention of behaving unhand-somely; and the message should be to say, that you greatly wish to have the honour, or pleasure, whichever you like best, of seeing him for a few minutes. And then you may be very sure that he would send for you; and when you do get at him, you must not look as frightened and as miserable as you do now, but you must have

rather a gay, but at the same time a confidential air, and tell him that though you should never, under other circumstances, have thought of troubling him with your private affairs, yet that you trust he will favour you with his attention for five minutes. And then, Edward, you ought to look very happy and very triumphant, and go on to tell him that though the trifle you have lost to him—be sure you say trifle, Edward—that though the trifle you have lost to him would have been of no great consequence at any other time, it was very inconvenient at this moment, because—and here you should laugh, and hesitate a little—because you were this very night to elope with the loveliest girl in the world, whose father, a man of very high rank and enormous fortune, opposed your happiness because you could not, during the lifetime of your father, come forward with an income equal to her own. You should then add, in a gay, laughing, coaxing sort of way, that you hope and trust he will give us a day or two for the redeeming your I. O. U., as you cannot pay it immediately without dipping so deeply into your travelling purse as to render the elopement impossible. Because, of course, you can-

not apply to your father and mother, who would not consent to such a thing for the world."

Something like a smile took place of the portentous frown with which the young man had hitherto listened to his mother.

"Upon my word, ma'am, you seem to have considerable talent in the romancing line," said he; "and I won't deny that such a statement might be made in the tone you describe, without giving the prince any reason to suspect that I was a swindler. But be so good as to tell me what is to come next? Because this confidential statement, you know, will not do above once. Do you think it will?"

"No, certainly, Edward," replied his mother, laughing, "I do not think it, nor do I intend that you should try. Only get him to give you a little law, and the rest will be all plain sailing."

"Plain sailing? What can you mean, ma'am? Are we all to sail away from Rome? Is that your project?"

"No, not at all, Edward—only you and your wife."

"Ny wife? Do you mean that I am to get married to that odious Bertha within the next

twenty-four hours?" exclaimed the youth, the awful frown again taking possession of his features.

"There is no use in trying to look fierce about it, Edward. I am sure I have let you go on your own way very patiently, and had really made up my mind to wait your own time about it. And now it is you, and not I, who have made it necessary for you to marry her immediately. If the prince gives you leave and license to set off on this expedition—and even if there were no Maria in the case, I don't think he could refuse—but if he does give leave, he must know as well as you do, that the thing cannot be done in a moment. You must get out of the way of pursuit—nay, I am by no means sure that you must not go all the way to Scotland before you can get married. But when you are once the girl's husband, you may depend upon it Sir Christopher won't let your name be posted for the sake of saving three hundred pounds. What do you think of it, Edward? Can you suggest any thing better?"

"No, ma'am, I don't think I can—that is, if you really think it impossible to make my father give me the money. I should like that a great deal better," he replied.

"I tell you it is impossible," said his mother, frowning in her turn; "but you may try, if you please; you may go to him this moment, if you like it, and try what you can do."

"Not I, ma'am, I promise you; I have no taste for that sort of thing. But by the way, mother, will you be so obliging as to tell me how I am to set off with Miss Bertha on a journey to Scotland, without any money? Do you keep a little hoard, ma'am, always ready for the purpose?" demanded the youth.

"No, indeed, Edward," she replied, "Heaven knows I have not twenty pounds at my command, if my life depended upon it, and we have already got milliners' bills here that were perfectly unavoidable, but not the more easily paid, for all that. However, if I am not greatly mistaken, your good father has still got his wits enough about him to give us a cheque for this, if he never gives us another. I have never plagued you about it, but he has asked me over and over again, when I thought it was likely to happen."

Edward drew forth a sigh of great length and depth.

"Well then, I suppose," said he, "that I must

really submit, and swallow the gilded pill. Oh, heavens! how I shall hate her! And the poor dear Countess Tornorino!—it will give her a dreadful pang, I know. You must promise that you and the girls will be most particularly civil and attentive to her; and tell Agatha not to be rude to the tiresome husband, though I know she hates his love and his waltzing, as much as I adore both in his wife. But I shall like to find you all great friends when I come back.”

“Very well, my dear, we will promise to do every thing you wish in that way,” replied his mother, delighted to have brought him at last to do what she had often feared would be too long delayed. “I will go to your father directly, and get what I think will be sufficient for the purpose; he will be ready enough to give it, I’ll answer for him. Poor man! he often says it is the best stake we have yet to play for, but I won’t allow that yet—I wish Lynberry would come on to Rome at once—he never saw Maria looking as she does now. But we must not stay gossiping, Edward; you must go your way, and I must go mine, and may success attend us both!”

CHAPTER X.

FOR the two first days after Bertha's agitating encounter with Mademoiselle Labarre, she spent her time, excepting when meeting the Roberts family at table, wholly in her own apartment, half occupied in thanking Heaven for the providential meeting which had relieved her mind from such a weight of suffering, and the other half in almost counting the minutes that must intervene ere she should be able to set off on the journey that would bring her to her suffering father, and enable her to atone for the dreadful suspicions with which she had loaded him, by her dutiful efforts to cheer his solitude and soothe his remorse.

During the first vehemence of her strongly excited feelings, these thoughts, together with a restless disarrangement and re-arrangement of all her effects, as a preparation for packing, sufficed to occupy her time. But at length she remembered that weeks had still to come and go before her eagerness to set out could be turned to any useful account; and schooling herself into a more reasonable state of mind, she determined, as her carriage was hired by the month, and must be paid for, to turn it to profit in the most rational way she could, by once more revisiting the objects that she most wished to impress accurately on her memory.

She accordingly set out one morning as soon as breakfast was over, to take a last walk over every accessible part of St. Peter's; and having spent above two hours in giving a last lingering glance to the various points that most deeply interested and delighted her, and then recollecting that though there were so many things to be looked at again for the last time, she might still be able, the very day before her departure, to return to this greatest of all Rome's wonders to look her last farewell, she squeezed herself under the un-

liftable leather curtain that hung over the door, and walking with lingering steps across the matchless portico, reached her carriage by the descent leading from the Vatican.

While she was thus leaving the most glorious of Christian temples at one point, two young men were, arm in arm, approaching it at another. One of them appeared to have no eyes for anything but the solemn splendour of the fabric he was approaching; but the other, to whom it was more familiar, while he submitted to the creeping pace at which his friend mounted the flight of steps that led to the gorgeous entrance, permitted his eyes to wander, and caught sight of the light figure of Bertha as she descended the graduated slope to her carriage.

“Let St. Peter alone for one moment, Vincent,” said he, “while you give one look to the most delicate looking creature that ever condescended to bestow herself, *par amour*, upon mortal man.”

“How can you suffer such a one, let her wear what guise she will, to draw your eyes one single moment from the awful splendour of this portico, Lawry! replied the person he addressed; “let

us go on. And yet, I declare to you that I almost tremble at the thought of entering."

"Nonsense! you shall not enter till you have looked at that girl," replied Lawry, forcibly directing the steps of his vexed companion the way he wished. "I really want you to look at her, Vincent," he added more seriously, "for, upon the word of an English gentleman, I have had some pretty vehement struggles with myself, notwithstanding what I have said of her, to prevent my seeking an introduction in the hope of making her my wife."

This startling avowal produced the effect intended, and induced Mr. Vincent to bend his steps in the direction indicated. The first glance he caught was imperfect, for a column intervened; yet it was sufficient to convert the next step into a bound, and at the third he began fairly to run as fast as his legs could carry him towards the retreating Bertha.

But all the speed he could use only sufficed to make him perfectly sure that it was his young cousin that he saw before him; and then the active Luigi, having closed the carriage-door and sprung to his seat behind it, drove off, leaving him gazing

after it with a look so bewildered as to cause his friend a hearty laugh as he approached him.

A moment's reflection, however, restored Vincent to his usual composure. He resumed the arm of his friend, and turning back towards the portico, said very quietly, "You have made a blunder, Lawry : that young lady is an acquaintance—nay more, a relation of mine, and as little likely, I assure you, as possible," he added, with a smile, "to deserve the mysterious imputation you have cast upon her."

"I beg your pardon, my dear Vincent," said Lawry, suddenly standing still. "But I need not do so," he added, shaking off the air of embarrassment with which he had begun his speech. "It is idle to pretend to apologise for an offence it is impossible I can have committed. Your cursory view of that fair creature deceived you, Vincent. She is no relation of yours, take my word for it."

"But I will not take your word for it, my dear Lawry," replied Vincent, laughing. "I assure you that I know my young cousin by sight; and the only reason that I am now with you instead of being with her is, that I know not her address, as

I have always written to her *posta restante*, which I have done again this morning, requesting to know where she is, and I have no doubts or fears but that I shall get an answer from her to-morrow morning. I am not much in the habit of betting, Lawry, but I will lay ten scudi to one, that if you see that young lady to-morrow you will see me by her side."

"But, my dear friend," returned Lawry, looking a good deal embarrassed, "it is not only the lady, but her carriage and servants, which I am certain I cannot mistake. I am half ashamed to confess it, but the fact is that I have followed that young creature about from church to church, from ruin to ruin, from gallery to gallery, for weeks past. I know her bonnet, her mantle, and her gray and black parasol, as well as she does herself; and, moreover, I confess that I have condescended to gossip with her *valet de place* till I know every circumstance concerning her."

"Do you know the name of the family with whom she is living?" demanded Vincent.

"I doubt if I do," replied his friend; "the Italian pronounced the name in a manner which, though he repeated it a dozen times, was perfectly

unintelligible to me. He says they are all English, but the name sounded Italian. Huberti, I think he said, or something like it."

"And her own name?" said Vincent, colouring slightly.

"That he could not tell me, frankly confessing that it was too difficult for him to remember."

"Did you ever speak to the lady you mention?" demanded Vincent.

"Never!" was the almost eager reply.

"There was something in her appearance which impressed me with a feeling that would have rendered it impossible to address her as one might do any other woman in the same circumstances. I know I should make a fool of myself if I ventured to get acquainted with her, and therefore I have never obtruded myself sufficiently to attract her notice for a single moment."

"Now then, Lawry, I think the mystery becomes less difficult of solution. Had you conversed with her, I might still have been puzzled. But I think you will allow that it is more likely you may have blundered about the identity of a lady to whom you have never spoken, than that the daughter of Sir Christopher Har-

rington, and my greatly esteemed young cousin, should be living in the manner you mentioned."

"Most assuredly I should so decide, were that the only alternative before us, Vincent. But it is not. My theory is, that you have mistaken my less fortunate lady for your fair cousin."

"Do not let us talk any more about it, Lawry. I do assure you it is quite too absurd to suppose there can be any possible mistake on my part. But let us go somewhere else. I will not enter St. Peter's to-day. Indeed it was a treason against my cousin Bertha to think of seeing it without her."

"Bertha!" repeated Lawry, suddenly standing still; and when Vincent turned to look at him, his whole face was scarlet.

"For Heaven's sake, Lawry, what have you got in your head now? you look as if you were going to fall into a fit of apoplexy. What is it has made you change colour so vehemently?"

For a moment the young man stood irresolute, and then replied, "I was startled by the name you mentioned."

"What name, sir?" said Vincent, abruptly.

"The name of Bertha," replied Lawry, quietly.

“Be very careful, Mr. Lawry, neither in jest nor earnest to mention that name lightly! I certainly do not mean to threaten you: you know me too well to suppose it. I would only warn you against doing what your own excellent nature would lead you to repent of bitterly,” said Vincent, solemnly.

“For mercy’s sake, Vincent, let us both be reasonable, if we can,” returned the other. “There is probably some blunder in this business, that, if we are wise enough not to quarrel first, may make us both laugh when it is understood. The name of the young person I have been speaking of is Bertha—a coincidence too remarkable to be easily dismissed as accidental. Her servant in speaking of her constantly called her ‘*La Signorina Bertha.*’ Instead, therefore, of tormenting ourselves and each other, by disputing about what is possible or impossible, let us go to this man Luigi Mondorlo, and learn from him what right he has to make such assertions respecting this lady as he has made to me.”

“Do you know where to find him?” inquired Mr. Vincent.

“Yes,” replied Lawry, “I commenced my acquaintance with him by inquiring where he might

be found, in case I or my friends should have need of a *valet de place*."

"Come along, then, in the name of common sense," said Vincent; and the two young men, once more arm-in-arm, set off at a rapid pace for the Piazza di Spagna.

There they readily obtained the address of Luigi Mondorlo, and immediately repaired to his lodgings; but the man was not yet returned from his morning's attendance on the signorina, and a good deal of impatience had to be endured while the almost equally anxious friends promenaded the remarkably dirty street before his door. Sooner, however, than he could have been reasonably expected, the man appeared, and civilly saluted Lawry.

"I want to speak with you for five minutes, Luigi," said that gentleman, assuming the tone of an old acquaintance. "Have you any room you can take us into for a few minutes? I want to have a little conversation with you."

"You shall be welcome, sir, to the best I have," replied the man courteously, "and the other signore too, if he likes to enter. Perhaps you have found a job for me, signor?"

They entered the humble apartment of the *valet de place* accordingly, and Lawry immediately addressed their host as follows :

“We have just been at St. Peter’s, Luigi, and there we saw you and your carriage, and the lady upon whom you are attending. This gentleman thinks that he has known her formerly, and wishes to learn from you all you know respecting her present situation.”

“Formerly, sir?” said the man; “the poor lady is too young, I should think, for any one to have known much of her long.”

“Young people may be known as well as old ones, my friend,” said Vincent. “But I wish you would tell me how much you know about her, for I am acquainted with her family, and all you can tell will be interesting to them. Do you know her name, my good fellow?”

“I am afraid I don’t know how to pronounce it properly,” he replied, “but I certainly ought to know it.”

“Is she called Bertha Harrington?” said Vincent.

“Yes, sir, that is her name,” answered the man, without the least hesitation.

"And what do you know about her?" continued Vincent, looking more puzzled than alarmed.

"No harm whatever, sir," replied the man ;
"at least, nothing that any reasonable gentleman ought to call harm. Because such things are all their own doing. All I know is that she has hired me, as many other pretty ladies living in the same manner have done before, and that I wait upon her, and she pays me. I may perhaps have said to this gentleman that she goes about in a way that don't look as if she was over and above devoted to the gentleman, whoever he is, that she lives with. But that was only guess work on my part. What I did not tell him, though, because I have only just found it out, is, that I suspect, poor young lady! that she is not contented with her condition, and that she is going to make a nun of herself in the same convent where my sister is. My sister says she is pretty well sure of it, because the poor young lady was shut up with Father Maurizio for above two hours on Wednesday; and to the truth of that I can testify, seeing that I waited for her at the door of the Santa Consolazione on that day for a great deal longer than that."

"And all that you know about this young lady

then is, that she pays for her own carriage, goes about seeing all the curious things in Rome without any companion, and that she had a long conversation with a Roman-Catholic priest last Wednesday," said Vincent, with the air of a man completely relieved from all his doubts and fears.

"Yes, Signor," replied Luigi, "that is all I know, excepting that the Italians generally see through these kind of things pretty quickly, and that we may often be said to know a good deal more than we see."

"And this is the case, I presume, in love and religion, equally," said Vincent, "otherwise you could scarcely be so sure of her intending to become a nun, as you appear to be."

"Why, as to that, sir, I have not only the opinion of my holy sister to enlighten me, but also the fact that she has told me this very day that she shall have no occasion for my services, nor for the carriage either, beyond the current month for which we were last hired."

"Well, then, Mr. Luigi Mondorlo, I will not trouble you with any more inquiries, except as to the present address of the young lady in question.

She is my near relation, and I wish to see her immediately."

"I hope, signor, I have not brought the young lady into trouble by any thing I have said?" replied the man, looking greatly disconcerted. When young gentlemen make inquiries about young ladies, like this gentleman did, we never make any objection to answering them, because it is most likely that it may be advantageous to both parties. But relations you see, signor, are quite different; and I don't feel as if it were quite honourable to tell you where she lives."

Vincent smiled, and drawing out his purse, drew from it a piece of gold, which he presented to the conscientious valet, saying,

"In this case, my good friend, I do assure you that you have nothing to fear. You will do no harm, believe me, in giving me the lady's address, for I am quite sure of getting it from another quarter to-morrow. But as I am impatient to see her, I would prefer taking it now. This Napoleon will pay you for the trouble of writing it."

"It is impossible to doubt the word of so perfect a gentleman," replied Luigi, with a profound bow, and dipping the stump of an antiquated pen

into a bottle of ink, he scrawled in tolerably legible characters the address of the Robertses.'

The two gentlemen then took their leave, but Vincent did not now pass his arm under that of Lawry. But perhaps this was only because he now meant to pursue his way alone.

After walking in silence the few steps which brought them to the corner of the street, Vincent stood still, and turning to his companion with a smile, rather more quizzing than cordial, he said, "And now, Mr. Lawry, I must wish you good morning, as I certainly do not mean to lose a moment in waiting on Miss Harrington, in order to inform her of the result of her antiquarian researches. But before we part, do me the favour to tell me if you think the testimony of the Signor Luigi Mondorlo of better authority than mine, respecting the real position of the lady who has been the principal theme of our conversation?"

"Be generous, Vincent!" cried Lawry, with considerable emotion. "You must know well enough, without my telling you, the contempt and indignation in which I hold myself for having listened to the gabble of such a fellow! But it is not him whom I should despise; it is myself. An

Italian lackey may be well excused for judging after his kind, but that an Englishman should look at such an Englishwoman, and be so beguiled, is monstrous—I have no one to blame but myself.”

“I think so too,” said Vincent, quietly.

“Then I suppose you mean to cut me as a punishment for my folly?” said Lawry, colouring to the ears.

“By no means,” replied Vincent, his good-humour quite restored by the genuine suffering which he read in the countenance of his unlucky friend.

“On the contrary, I shall have much pleasure in presenting you to my young relation, and will promise not to say a word about the flattering sort of attention you have been paying her—only asking you in return to be more cautious in your judgments for the future. I suspect that both Englishmen, and Englishwomen too, are likely enough to blunder in their estimates of each other when meeting in a foreign land. They are seen in a new, and, what is to them, a false light, and I conceive that the outline is often a good deal distorted by it. Good bye!” and Vincent held out his hand with a smile.

Lawry took it, and pressed it gratefully, but looked very much as if he knew not whether to be most gratified or most frightened at the thoughts of the promised introduction.

CHAPTER XI.

WHILE the name and fame of poor Bertha were undergoing this, to her, most unsuspected discussion, she was herself exposed to an adventure equally unexpected.

Mrs. Roberts was perfectly well aware that Miss Harrington's usual manner of spending her mornings brought her home about an hour before their usual time for dining ; and, therefore, although a short interview with her son, subsequent to that which has been recently described, left her very desirous of seeing her, she sat down very patiently to wait for her return at the expected time. It was therefore with great satisfaction

that she saw her drive up to the door a full hour earlier than usual, upon her return from her farewell visit to St. Peter's.

Mrs. Roberts's carriage, with her two daughters, and the man-servant in attendance on them, was not expected to return till rather later than usual, so that the interview with Miss Harrington projected by her hostess was not likely to be interrupted.

As Bertha mounted the stairs, she perceived Mrs. Roberts on the landing-place, waiting to receive her.

"My dear Miss Harrington!" she exclaimed, "I am so glad you are come back! Step into the drawing-room for one moment, for I want to speak to you."

Had Bertha wished to refuse, she would have found it very difficult to do so; but she really did not. The certainty of her approaching departure had softened her heart so greatly towards Mrs. Roberts and her whole family, that she would not have been guilty of the least rudeness, to avoid speaking to either of them; she therefore entered the drawing-room with rather a smiling bow of acquiescence, though she held in

her hand an unopened letter, which the maid-servant had given her before she came up stairs. Nevertheless, she knew at the very first glance that it was from Vincent; and the facility with which she thus submitted to delay the reading it, was a strong proof that the heavy load which had been taken from her heart by the communication of Father Maurice had produced an excellent effect.

“Now then, my dear,” said Mrs. Roberts, shutting the door, “I have a very great favour to beg of you, and I feel almost sure you will grant it, because I have never troubled you with asking any such favour before. I have just got a ticket sent me to admit us to see that greatest of all curiosities that has been dug up where they are building that grand new church to St. Paul, outside the town, you know, my dear. This is the last day it is to be exhibited, and the girls won’t come home with the carriage till it is too late. Will you have the great, *great* kindness to take me in your carriage? There is plenty of time before dinner.”

“You are perfectly welcome to the carriage, Mrs. Roberts,” replied Bertha. “I am only afraid that it is driven away.”

“No, it isn’t, my dear, for I told the maid to stop it,” replied Mrs. Roberts, exultingly.

“But at any rate, ma’am,” returned Bertha, with a good-humoured smile, “you must condescend to go without a footman, for I sent off Luigi with a message to a shop, where they have something to do for me that I want to have finished directly.”

“Oh, my dear, that won’t make the least bit of difference in the world,” replied Mrs. Roberts. “It is not as if we were setting off to pay visits, you know—that would be quite a different thing. But I don’t know yet, my dear Miss Harrington, if you are quite aware of all the favour I meant to ask of you. The ticket is for the whole family, and it will be too dismal for me to go alone. I should take it as so very particularly kind if you would go with me!”

This was a sort of request which Bertha would most probably have refused point blank, or at any rate would have granted very ungraciously, had it been made to her a week before; but the certainty that she was soon going to leave for ever the home which, though distasteful, had afforded her at least a tolerably peaceful shelter, softened her

heart, and she replied, without manifesting any symptoms of repugnance, that she would certainly accompany her, if she would have the kindness to excuse her reading the letter she had just received, as she went along.

Mrs. Roberts of course told her that she should not mind it at all, and they set off together.

The letter was from Mr. Vincent ; and deeply, oh ! very deeply did Bertha rejoice, as she discovered that it was dated from an hotel in Rome. The only circumstance which she thought could at that moment have increased her satisfaction at the healing news she had heard, had now occurred. She should see her cousin William before she left Rome, and she should be able to implore him, before they parted, to promise her that he would submit to be reconciled to her father, and to pay them a speedy visit at Castle Harrington.

She scarcely remembered at that happy moment that she would have some difficulty in explaining to her cousin the reasons which had led her to take so sudden and so important a resolution ; but she remembered that she had never fully explained to him her own ideas as to the reasons which she had supposed her father to have had

for sending her from him, and with equal caution had she avoided expressing to him the terrible feelings which, when they were last together, had made her return impossible.

She flattered herself, therefore, that her promise to Father Mauricè would in no way embarrass her, but that she should be able to explain her departure by simply stating the fact that she was tired of staying with the Robertses, and preferred taking the chance of finding a more comfortable home with her father.

In such meditations, and in again and again reading her precious letter, the time passed quickly enough, without her having recourse to the conversation of Mrs. Roberts. That lady, indeed, seemed much less disposed to converse than usual, sitting very profoundly still, neither drawing up the windows nor letting them down, as was usual with her, and looking altogether so demure and sedate, that she might have been taken for a well-drilled figure, performing a part in a state pageant.

At length, however, Bertha, who had more than once before visited the growing splendours

of St. Paul at Rome, began to think that they were a great while getting there.

“What direction did you give to the coachman, Mrs. Roberts?” said she. “I don’t think the man is coming the right way; and he ought to know the road, too, for he has been here with me two or three times.”

“I gave him the proper orders, my dear, I assure you,” replied Mrs. Roberts, composedly.

Bertha once more opened her letter, and read it through, and having closed and deposited it in her pocket, she again looked out of the window, and apparently saw some object that startled her, for she suddenly exclaimed, “Now, then, I am very sure that we are going wrong, for I see the trees in the burying-ground, near which we ought to have passed, precisely at right angles, or indeed rather behind us. What does all this mean, Mrs. Roberts? I really cannot spend all the afternoon driving about in this way—I want to get home, ma’am—I have a letter to write.”

And Bertha, as she spoke, got up, and put her head out of the window, evidently with an intention of stopping the coachman.

“My dear Miss Harrington! what are you

afraid of?" inquired Mrs. Roberts, playfully throwing an arm round her. "Do you think the horses are running away?"

But playfully as this was done and said, the caressing action of Mrs. Roberts was sufficiently vigorous to retain the young lady in her seat as long as it lasted.

This period, however, did not exceed about three minutes, during which Bertha, more displeased by the freedom than alarmed by any suspicion as to its cause, sat with immovable stateliness, only repeating, at intervals of about one minute each, "I am afraid of nothing, Mrs. Roberts."

But just as her indignant sort of submission to this strange embrace was about to give way before her irresistible desire to get rid of it, the carriage stopped, the arms of Mrs. Roberts were withdrawn, the carriage-door was thrown open, a large cloak (in the regular melo-dramatic style) was thrown over her, and before a single thought could arise, as to what it all meant, Bertha felt herself seized upon, and dragged out with a degree of violence that spared neither her limbs nor her nerves, and then deposited in another carriage,

which darted off as rapidly as four Roman post-horses could draw it.

Bertha's first efforts were directed to the doing battle with the folds of the cloak that had been wrapped round her, and she did it so effectually that she had no need to exhaust her faculties in wondering as to who could be the audacious perpetrator of the exploit ; for there sat Mr. Edward Roberts beside her, his arms folded in an attitude of bold defiance across his breast, his legs thrust out to the furthest extent that the vehicle permitted, and such an awful and determined frown upon his brow, as might have daunted the heart of most young ladies, situated as Miss Harrington was at that moment.

But by some strange peculiarity in that young lady's character, she positively felt almost as much inclination to laugh as to scream ; however, she did neither, but looking very deliberately at the young gentleman for a moment, she said quite in her usual tone of voice, " Will you be so obliging as to inform me, Mr. Edward Roberts, what may be your purpose in arranging this unexpected interview ?"

Perhaps it was the novelty of some of the cir-

cumstances attending the startling situation in which she found herself, which prevented the spirits of Bertha from sinking under such a paroxysm of terror as usually besets young ladies when they are run away with against their will.

But it must be confessed that there was something so out of the ordinary course of such affairs in the part which the young gentleman's mother had performed, and moreover an expression so perfectly unhackneyed and original in the countenance of the youth himself, that it is not much to be wondered at if the impression received by her nerves was also out of the common way.

The letter which she had just received, too, announcing the proximity of a protector, whose mere name, she suspected, would be sufficient to paralyse the courage of her ravisher, perhaps aided her considerably in the task of sustaining her dignity and presence of mind. Whatever the cause, the fact certainly was that Bertha, though she felt exceedingly angry, was very little alarmed, and appeared to await a reply to the question she had asked with great composure.

The young man, meanwhile, who had been

preparing himself for a scene of great violence, and who, having no very particular tender feelings towards his companion, was determined to carry his point by every sort of violence, short of actually stifling her in the huge cloak with which he had provided himself, was at first a good deal puzzled as to what tone he ought to take with so self-possessed a heroine. At one moment it struck him that the best way would be to begin making violent love to her, but a two-fold feeling stopped him—namely, the extreme disinclination which he felt for the occupation himself, with Bertha for his partner, and a pretty strong conviction that she would not bear it for an instant, and therefore that it might make her troublesome. So he pretended not to perceive that she was looking at him, and only said in reply to her question, “The moment of explanation, Miss Harrington, is not yet come.”

As if perfectly satisfied by this answer, Bertha settled herself very quietly in the corner of the carriage, and in order to lessen the awkwardness of the silent *tête-à-tête*, she again drew the precious letter from her pocket.

But, precious as it was, it certainly did not at

that moment occupy her wholly; for notwithstanding her comfortable contempt for Mr. Edward Roberts and his ridiculous attempt, she did nevertheless condescend to bestow a little of the leisure she seemed likely to enjoy, in meditating on the probable motives of the young gentleman, and the easiest and readiest means of getting rid of him.

As to his motives, a much duller girl than Bertha might easily have guessed them. Little as she had been accustomed to mix herself with the family, she had seen enough of their proceedings to convince her that they were often distressed for money; and strange as her position in their family had been, and totally inconsistent with her station as was her being with them at all, she was by no means ignorant of the high consideration in which they held that station, or of the exaggerated estimate which they had formed of her probable wealth, from the expenditure which her father's liberal allowance permitted. These two facts placed side by side, naturally enough led to the obvious conclusion that Mrs. Roberts and her son, to say nothing of the rest of the family, thought that the best thing they could do would

be to get possession of her fortune, by getting legal possession of herself. As she came to this conclusion, which she arrived at pretty rapidly, she felt disposed to give Edward some credit for the discernment which had prevented his ever attempting to make love to her.

“He has taken by far the better way,” thought she; “but it will not do, for all that.”

Edward, meanwhile, was a good deal more puzzled by the young lady’s demeanour, than she was by his.

“Is she too much struck by the firmness of my manner to utter another word?” he asked himself, without, however, being at all able to return himself an answer; and then the new idea suggested itself, that after all, perhaps, her pride and reserve had only been assumed, to prevent his seeing what she really thought of him. If so, the business would be more easy than he had expected to find it. “But for that,” thought he, “I care not a single rush.”

And thus, in tacit mutual defiance, they rolled along, without exchanging another word.

CHAPTER XII.

MISS HARRINGTON knew very little of the environs of Rome. She had on one occasion driven far enough to indulge herself with a ramble among the arches of the magnificent aqueduct, but this had been her only distant excursion, and this she knew had not led her in a direction which it was at all likely Mr. Edward Roberts would follow on the present occasion; she therefore felt no particular eagerness to look out of the window in order to ascertain in what direction she was going, but listened patiently to the voice of common sense, which told her that, go which way they would, they must seek the habitation of man, both

for the purpose of changing horses and obtaining food.

Whenever this should happen, Bertha knew that she had one great advantage over her companion—namely, that she spoke Italian with great facility, it having been made one of her earliest studies, while she greatly doubted if he could make himself understood.

Another advantage, of which she was likewise fully sensible, was that the enterprise she had before her was of much easier accomplishment than his, inasmuch as there was less difficulty in getting back to Rome when only one stage from it, than in reaching Gretna Green from the same spot.

Notwithstanding her courageous patience, however, the stage did appear a very long one; and at one moment the lady so nearly raised herself sufficiently to look out of the window, that the gentleman made a corresponding movement on his side to get the cloak ready to throw over her if she did.

“Time and the hour,” however, brought them to the place where the horses were to be changed, and Bertha very stoutly made up her mind that she would not go any further. When the carriage

stopped, therefore, she sat very particularly still, and once again began reading her letter. Edward looked at her, and at the window next her, and perceiving that both were just as they ought to be, set himself to perform the unavoidable business of paying the postillions. Had he been more in the habit of running away with ladies without consulting them upon the subject, he would probably have paid them before he set out, or it might have occurred to him that a courier would have been a very useful appendage; as it was, however, he was under the painful necessity of paying the boys himself, and thankful was he, as he let down the window for the purpose, that his companion seemed so little disposed to be troublesome.

Bertha was right in supposing that Mr. Edward Roberts was no great proficient in speaking the Italian language, but she was wrong if she thought that he could not do it at all. Had this been the case, he probably would not have ventured upon attempting to carry through his enterprise without the assistance of a servant. But having only a scanty stock of money, and a very great opinion of his own cleverness, he learned by heart the

rate of posting, the usual amount for the *buono mano*, and the value of the current coin, and thought that with the aid of his own peculiar sharp-wittedness, it would do very well.

When the boys drew near the window, Edward again sent a furtive glance into the corner, but Bertha was sitting in the most languid and quiescent attitude possible.

Edward then rehearsed the amount of their claim as distinctly as he could, and one of the lads uttered a few words in reply, to which Edward replied, "*Non so.*"

"He is asking you for more money," said Bertha, without moving an inch, and in too quiet a tone to be at all alarming.

"I have given them the right sum," replied Edward, seeming to forget, in the anxiety concerning this financial transaction, the rather peculiar circumstances under which he was travelling.

"Tell him that he must give you a crown more," said Bertha, in Italian, to the post-boy, and giving him at the same time a good-humoured little nod, which, while it propitiated the boy, was still further calculated, by its air of smiling indifference, to lull the suspicions of Edward.

Upon this hint, the two post-boys began to be gaily clamorous; and when the disconcerted young man attempted to draw up the glass, the foremost of them put his hand upon it to prevent him.

“You must give it him,” said Bertha, in the same easy tone; and then without changing her voice or her attitude, she said to the boys, much in the tone she might have used if remonstrating with them, “*Ecco amici!* He is a mean wretch, who is running off with me against my will because I am very rich. Save me from him, and you shall have fifty Napoleons each.”

“How? what?” they both exclaimed in the same breath, with true Italian vivacity.

“They are getting into a passion,” said Bertha, addressing Edward, but still keeping herself immovably still in her corner; and then added in Italian, “Come round and open the door on my side; I will be in your arms in an instant, and fifty Napoleons shall be yours!”

The first set of horses were taken off the carriage, and the second were not yet put on. The two lads passed under the pole in an instant, in another the door on Bertha's side was opened,

and Bertha, according to promise, was in the arms of her deliverers.

Edward sprang out after her, but she clung with all her strength to the lad who had caught her, while his companion very manfully kept Edward at a distance.

“Is there no one who speaks French here?” he exclaimed, in the language he named, and which he really gabbled very fluently. “Is there nobody can understand me, while I explain to them that this unhappy young lady is my sister and is insane? She has made her escape from her keepers, and I am now conveying her back to her wretched mother.”

“Take me to the police,” cried Bertha, firmly, “let them send for a physician to decide whether I am mad or not.”

“It will be barbarous if you detain her,” said Edward, in French, addressing himself to the most decent-looking person in the crowd that was already assembling round them, and who was the only one there who appeared to understand him. “Think of the misery of her poor mother,” he added in a piteous voice, and again making an effort to seize her.

The man to whom she clung, resisted this attempt by giving Edward a pretty sharp blow on his head, upon which the decent-looking stranger interfered, saying in Italian that let which would be right, and which wrong, it was not fitting to beat a strange gentleman about in that way, and that he feared mischief might come of it; adding, that the safest course would be not to interfere at all, but to let the gentleman take care of the lady, as he was doubtless the fit person to do so.

The frightened post-boy disengaged himself from Bertha's arms, and slunk away, for the speaker was one of the greatest men in the country, and steward moreover to a cardinal.

In another moment Bertha would have been in the undisputed power of the young villain who had carried her off; but in the instant that intervened between her being thrown off by the post-boy, and seized in the grasp of Edward, she espied an old man just emerging from a bye-path into the high road, whose dress proclaimed him to be a priest.

With the speed of lightning she darted towards him, and dropping on her knees at his feet,

she exclaimed, "Save me, my father, save me from the villany of that young man, who is carrying me off by force, in order to marry me against my will, and get possession of my fortune."

The venerable priest extended his hand to raise her, and then looked round him upon the crowd, who had already followed Bertha, as if for explanation of the words she had spoken.

"What does all this mean?" said the good man. "Where does this young lady come from?"

"From a mad-house, father," replied the man, to whom Edward had again and again repeated the same story. "This young gentleman is her brother, and only wants to take her back to her friends. Their mother, he says, will be in a desperate fright till she gets her back again, and it is likely enough she will."

"Reverend father, I am not mad," said Bertha, with the same admirable composure and presence of mind which she had shown from the very first moment that she discovered her situation; "but even if that young man's story were true, it would not be proper for me to be dragged thus across the country without the decent care of a female attendant, and in the charge of a person so igno-

rant as not to be able to make himself understood by the post-boys that drive him."

"There is reason in that, at any rate, Father Mark," said one of the standers-by, "nor does there seem to be anything like madness in the manner in which the young lady says it."

"I do assure you I am not mad," said Bertha, in reply, and looking at the person who had spoken with a sort of friendly smile. "But if that is not true, I can tell you what is," she continued, in the same quiet tone, "my father is a very rich man, and I am his only child."

As all this was spoken in Italian, Edward understood not a word of it, and quite at a loss to guess what was going on, he could only repeat in French,

"Don't believe one single word of what she says; she is raving mad, quite raving mad, as I am ready to swear before a migistrate. Take care that you don't believe her, for she is telling you nothing but lies."

"Do you understand Italian, young man?" said the priest, speaking in that language.

Edward stared at him, but did not answer.

“Why do you not answer me?” said the priest in French, and in a tone that seemed to express displeasure at his silence.

“Do not be angry with me for that, good sir,” replied Edward, with very much humility. “I did not answer, because I did not understand you.”

“You mean to say that you do not understand Italian?” said Father Mark.

“No, sir, I do not understand a word of it,” replied the confused Edward.

“Then if you do not know what this young lady says, how can you be sure that she is telling lies?” said the old man.

“Because she is the greatest liar that ever lived,” replied Edward colouring.

“Then she is a sad, wicked girl, young man,” replied the priest, “and should be both punished and admonished. But perhaps it may be a family failing, and as you are so very nearly related to her, it may not be quite safe to believe all you say. I am the curate of this parish, young gentleman; and as your sister, as you call her, has put herself under my protection, I will assist you, if you please, in taking her back to her friends.

Here, boys, bring out your horses; we will all go on together."

Embarrassed greatly beyond the power of even attempting to extricate himself, Edward stood as still as if the old man's words had been a spell to fix him on the spot; and the nearest approach he made towards recovering himself, was the putting his hand to his forehead, to assist him in the act of deciding what he was to do next.

The idea of proceeding with his elopement, encumbered with the presence of a venerable priest, whom he was aware it would be difficult to persuade that he would do well to unite him in holy matrimony to the lady whom he had just offered to swear was his sister, was not to be dwelt upon for a moment. No! not even though he were to declare that they were both Roman Catholics, could he see any hope of turning this threatened companion to profit. Besides, the unfortunate youth, all bewildered as he was, felt convinced that if he persisted in going on, they should certainly not proceed a great many miles towards Scotland without some very troublesome remonstrances on the part of the old gentleman. Must he then abandon his enterprise? The figure of

his princely creditor seemed to rise before him as he stood, and his excited fancy caused him to start, much as he might have done had the kicking he so confidently anticipated been already applied.

The horses approached—they were fastened to the carriage—the postboys mounted—and a civil horse-boy let down the steps of the vehicle for Bertha to mount. She immediately prepared to do so, merely saying to the priest as a preliminary, “You have promised, holy father, to come with me.”

“I have, my daughter, and I will keep my word,” said the good man, who, though old, and a priest, had something of drollery in his look and manner, as he said to the disconsolate Edward, “Now then, young gentleman, be pleased to tell us, in your best French, which way the boys are to drive, in order to reach the residence of the distressed lady, your mother, with as little delay as possible.”

“Let them drive to the devil,” said the heir of the Robertses, in very plain English; and then stepping into the carriage, because he felt it to be utterly impossible at that moment to dispose of

his person in any other manner, he began letting down and drawing up the window with great violence.

Notwithstanding the strange and by no means agreeable position in which she found herself, it was positively not without some difficulty that Bertha prevented herself from laughing; and when Father Mark, turning towards her, gravely inquired what orders the young gentleman had given, she could not resist the temptation of translating his words literally; adding, however, with becoming sedateness, that if the reverend father would have the kindness to take her instructions instead, she would recommend that they should immediately return to Rome.

“Be it so, my daughter,” said Father Mark. “I believe that with all your madness, you will be the safer guide. To what part of Rome would you go, young lady? Is it true that you have a mother in Italy?”

This question effectually restored the gravity of poor Bertha, and for a moment, she too was at a loss as to what orders she should give. At length, however, she remembered, like a rational little creature as she was, that she had nothing to

trust to, that could enable her to escape from what was still a very embarrassing situation, but her own common sense and prompt decision; and she therefore turned to the good father, with something in her look and voice, that spoke more plainly of her bereavement than she had then leisure to do in words, and said,

“ No, father, no ; but I am not friendless. Here is the address of a relation, into whose hands I beg you will consign me,” and as she spoke, she drew from her pocket the letter of Vincent, which contained the name of the hotel at which he was lodged.

“ That is a much frequented hotel, young lady,” said the priest, on hearing this address. “ Have you been living there ?”

“ No,” replied Bertha, colouring deeply, as she remembered that all she knew of the place whither she desired to be taken, was that three young men of her acquaintance were lodging there.

“ Then wherefore, my child, should you wish to go to so very public a house of reception ?” inquired Father Mark. “ Why not return to the friends from whom you say this young man has violently withdrawn you ?”

“ Because they are *his* friends, and not *mine*,” returned Bertha eagerly ; “ because his mother assisted in this wicked act, and that I know I should not be safe in her hands.”

The good man began to feel the weight of the responsibility he was bringing upon himself. The story seemed alarmingly improbable, and he hesitated.

Bertha saw it, and would have trembled, like all previous heroines under similar circumstances, had she not been sustained by the strong matter-of-fact sort of persuasion, that young Mr. Edward Roberts would find it quite impossible to convert her into Mrs. Edward Roberts against her will. She looked at Father Mark’s vexed and harassed expression of countenance, nevertheless, with some anxiety, and said,

“ If your kindness, holy father, will induce you to go back with me to Rome, the friend to whose care I wish you to consign me, will easily satisfy you as to his right to undertake the charge.”

“ It is a gentleman, then, my child, to whom you wish to go ? ” returned the old man, knitting his reverend brows. “ Tell me what relation does he bear to you ? ”

"He is my cousin, father," replied Bertha, blushing violently.

"And of what age?" said the priest.

"I don't know," replied Bertha, without looking at him.

The two post-boys looked at each other, and laughed. An extremely respectable-looking middle-aged female, who, seeing the priest in the crowd, had ventured to join it, shook her head very expressively, and walked away; and other women, less decorous in their appearance and behaviour, whispered together and tittered.

"It is impossible, daughter, quite impossible," said Father Mark, making a step or two backwards, "that I should take charge of a young lady upon the high road in this way, and then take her to a public hotel, and place her in the hands of a cousin, who, for anything I know, may be as young as herself, merely because she tells me that she should like to go to him. Upon my word," he added, looking round to the good people who had been so much more amused than edified by Bertha's proposal, "upon my word, though I am very sorry to say it, I think your

proposal does look a little as if you were not in your right mind."

He was immediately answered by a buzz, made up of such words as "*si, si—seculo*," and the like, all indicating the inclination of the parishioners, who were gathered round him, to agree with him in this opinion.

Edward, meanwhile, was not altogether idle. For the first minute or two after he had re-entered the carriage, he resigned himself to his position in hopeless despair of mending it; but the length of the discussion which followed suggested itself the idea that Miss Bertha might not have every thing her own way yet; and having noted the retreating movement of the priest, he sprang from the carriage again, and with great vehemence and volubility, repeated the statement he had before given, earnestly conjuring the puzzled old man to believe him, and adding, with a very ominous shake of the head, "That he knew not what he might bring upon himself by such unwarrantable interference."

"You are the strangest boy and girl that ever I chanced to meet with," said the priest. "Sure enough, it is likely a man, though he were ten

times a curate, may get into a scrape if he meddles with what does not concern him, and worse still if he ventures to pass judgment upon matters that he does not understand. The young man talks of taking you to his mother, young lady; and whether she be his mother or yours, or, as he is ready to swear, the mother of both, it sounds at any rate like a more decent proposal than your own, which, truth to say, seems nothing better than desiring to be taken to a public hotel, and given over to the protection of a young cousin. For had he been an old one, you would have been sure to have said so."

"Let them go as they come, Father Mark," said the best dressed man of the whole circle that had gathered round them. "No blame, you know, can follow that, for they are but heretics after all. But the blessed saints only know what may come of your taking away a beautiful young lady from one gentleman, and handing her over to another."

"By Saint Antonio, signor, I am afraid you say true," returned the alarmed father. "If they were true, faithful, and believing servants of his holiness," and here he crossed himself, "it would be quite a different matter. But as it is, I should

be in great danger of doing more wrong than right by interfering."

And having thus spoken, he deliberately turned round and began to walk away.

"Stay, father!" cried Bertha, stepping rapidly but not vehemently after him, "as I have failed to make you understand the propriety of my being conveyed to the only relation I have in Rome, let me ask you if you are happy enough to know the holy Father Maurizio, of the Santa Consolazione?"

"Do I know him, my daughter?" returned Father Mark, suddenly turning back. "Instead of answering your question, let me ask you the same, do *you* know him?"

"Yes, Father, I do. It is to the convent of the Santa Consolazione that I now implore you to take me," said Bertha, solemnly, "and he will thank you for the service, better than I can do it myself."

"You are known to the holy Father Maurizio, of the Santa Consolazione?" cried Father Mark, again. "That makes all the difference in the world, my daughter."

"Young man," he added, approaching Edward,

who had placed himself at the side of Bertha, and seemed ready to seize upon her, "young man, if you will take my advice, you will return to Rome by the public diligence, which will change horses here in about half an hour; and I will undertake to place this young lady in such protection as none of her friends can object to."

And so saying, he courteously presented his hand to the well-pleased Bertha, who, gratefully accepting it, mounted the carriage, and had the extreme satisfaction of seeing the venerable priest follow her, and settle himself in the place which the blooming Edward had occupied before. In another moment the door was closed upon them, the whips cracked, and they set off full gallop for Rome.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE distance between the little village where the foregoing scenes took place, and the gates of Rome, was not great ; but long before it had been passed over by Bertha and her reverend companion, the most perfect and pleasant good intelligence was established between them.

Father Mark was a kind-hearted old man, and by no means deficient in intelligence ; but it is difficult to find, within half-a-dozen leagues of the Vatican, any ecclesiastic of Father Mark's rank, whose first thoughts and movements upon any sudden emergency are not actuated by the same species of

feeling which produced the often quoted exclamation, "*What would Mrs. Grundy say to this!*"

The happy thought, however, which caused Bertha to name the well-known and highly-reverenced Father Maurice, as the person under whose care she desired to place herself, had furnished in her case the most satisfactory reply ; it was quite impossible to doubt that Mrs. Grundy and all her household would be sure to approve whatever was done in so venerable a name ; and the good Father Mark's spirits being soothed by it into a state of perfect tranquillity, he became equally able and willing to appreciate the truth of poor Bertha's painful narrative, and the good sense and presence of mind which had enabled her to exchange the protection of Mr. Edward Roberts for that of so respectable an individual as himself.

Having thus satisfactorily rescued her from all the pains and perils incidental to such an adventure as that of which our gallant young Englishman had made her the heroine, we may leave her for a while in order to follow our more legitimate heroine, Mrs. Roberts, on her return to Rome, after she had performed her part of it.

Had Luigi Mondorlo, Miss Harrington's valet-de-place, been of the party, the sudden transferring of that young lady's person from her own carriage to that of the bold Edward would probably not have been so easily achieved ; for in all the evil which this sagacious Italian had invented and propagated respecting her, there was not the slightest shade of ill-will ; on the contrary, he thought her one of the most charming *signorinas* he had ever seen in his life ; and the fact of such transmission being against her will, which was made manifest by the melodramatic circumstance of the muffling mantle, would have been fully sufficient to rouse the Roman spirit of Luigi to attempt her rescue.

But with her coachman it was quite a different affair : with him she had literally never exchanged a single word. He was a taciturn personage, of no very prepossessing appearance, who had constantly received his orders from the lips, and his wages from the hands of Luigi ; and who took little more part in the scene which followed, when his carriage was met by that of Edward, than an automaton might have done.

He evidently thought it was some gallant

adventure, in which he had no concern ; and it was only when Mrs. Roberts, very unnecessarily, displayed a piece of gold between her fingers, as she made a sign to him that he was to come down from his box, and close the carriage-door upon her—a ceremony which none of poor Bertha's already departed *cortège* had thought it necessary to perform—it was only then that he began to feel the slightest interest in the affair.

And even then, though he promptly obeyed the signal, performed the service required, and received his reward, he mounted his box again, and drove the lady back to her lodgings with precisely the same degree of indifference that he had driven her from them.

His month's wages had been paid him in advance ; he had already received an intimation from Luigi that his services would not be required when that term was over ; and therefore the young gentleman's driving off with the young lady, either with or without her consent, was a circumstance much too unimportant to arouse any feeling whatever.

He was not in love with the young lady, and he was therefore not jealous of the young gentle-

man, so what *could* he find to interest him in the adventure?

The Roman people of the present day are marvellously little given to meddling with matters which do not concern them.

Mrs. Roberts looked radiantly triumphant as she mounted the stairs to her drawing-room. She had been a little anxious about getting home before her daughters, because, proud as she was of her own share in the transaction, as well as of the glorious success which had attended it, she did not quite like that any body should know that it was *she*, who, in the first instance, had run off with the young lady. But all anxiety on this score was removed, the moment she perceived that it was a female who opened the door for her. Had the young ladies returned, the man-servant would have returned with them; and as, next to attending the carriage, his most strenuously enjoined duty was to make himself visible the moment the door of their dwelling was unclosed, she instantly felt herself relieved from the only uneasy feeling that interfered with her perfect contentment. Her first act on entering her drawing-room was to throw herself

into an arm-chair, clasp her hands, and piously exclaim, "Thank God, that's done!"

And then she got up and looked in the glass, to see that her curls were not deranged in consequence of the slight flick she had received from the corner of the cloak, as it had been thrown over Bertha by the spirited hand of her dear son. But she found herself looking exceedingly well, and quite as a lady ought to do who was mother-in-law to an heiress. And then, feeling rather thirsty, she unlocked the cupboard, and presented herself with a small tumbler full of Ovietto, after taking which she felt greatly refreshed, and immediately set about doing all that was proper and right under the circumstances.

In the first place she went to the door of Bertha's room, and knocked at it repeatedly, quite loudly enough for the solitary maid-servant to hear her. She might, perhaps, have thought it judicious to address some inquiries to this grim-looking performer of all work, could she have managed to make herself understood in the same admirable manner that she had done in Paris; but this being beyond her power, she contented

herself with making her reiterated knockings at the door of Bertha audible to the whole house; and then she sought her dozing husband in the little room allotted to him, where she pretty well knew she should find him engaged in sleeping away the last tedious hour before dinner.

Nor was she disappointed; there he was, poor man! seated upon one rush-bottomed chair, with his heels on another—a silk pocket-handkerchief over his head, to defend him from the attacks of the flies, his large fingers, with very dirty nails, interlaced upon his stomach, and though not quite asleep, as near to it as he could possibly contrive to get; his whole appearance being as little in accordance with the flashy finery of his race, as it is well possible to imagine.

“Roberts! Roberts!” vociferated his gayer half, “for Heaven’s sake, don’t lay up snoozing there any longer, when there are such strange things going on in the house! Get up, I tell you, this very minute. What do you think has happened, my dear?”

“Happened!” replied the poor nervous gentleman, pulling the handkerchief off his head, and dropping his heels upon the ground, “happened,

wife? There is nobody come for money, is there?"

Mrs. Roberts laughed aloud.

"Are you not grown into a perfect curmudgeon, Roberts?" said she, "you are for ever living in a fright about money; when you know very well, let the things go as much against us as they will, I have always taken care that nothing really bad should come of it.

"Then nothing particular *has* happened?" he returned. "Thank God!"

"Yes, you stupid man, but there *has*, though, and something that I have long told you would happen, though nobody but a fairy could say exactly *when*. Your son, Mr. Roberts, has eloped with the daughter of Sir Christopher Harrington."

"The devil he has!" exclaimed the old gentleman, looking one third-frightened, and two-thirds pleased. "Well, I am sure I can't help it. Boys and girls will be making love if they are thrown together. Her family and friends chose to send her amongst us. It was no doing of mine. I couldn't help Edward being so handsome, you know."

"No, my dear," replied his wife, "of course

you couldn't; but it will make a great noise, you may be sure of that. However, it can't do us any thing but good, any way. I always observe that it turns out to the advantage of girls, when any accident calls all eyes upon them. Every body is wanting to dance with them, and to talk to them. It is just the sort of thing to get them on."

"God grant it, my dear!" replied the affectionate father. "I am sure—"

But before he could finish the sentence, his two daughters entered the room, so gaily attired, and looking, as he thought, so very much like ladies of high fashion, that his long-depressed spirits became suddenly elevated, and he exclaimed,

"Well, my dear Sarah, I should not wonder, after all, if every thing turned out just as you have said."

"There would be a great deal more cause to wonder, Mr. Roberts, if it did not prove so," she replied. "I know myself, sir, though sometimes, I am sorry to say, it is plain enough that you do not know me. However, we will not begin quarrelling about that now."

And then, with a very becoming degree of

gravity, she informed her daughters of the event which had taken place.

“Eloped, has she?” said Agatha, with an expressive sneer. “I always suspected that there was something at the bottom of all her pretended disdain. Edward is a very handsome fellow, and as peculiarly elegant and fashionable as she is the reverse. I dare say the reason of her constant ill-humour was, that she was always jealous of him. I am not at all surprised at this termination of the affair.”

“What a fellow Edward is, mamma!” exclaimed Maria, with an air of great exultation. “He always said, you know, that he could marry her whenever he pleased, and I am sure he has proved that his words were true.”

Altogether, the Roberts family might fairly be said to have reconciled themselves to the event before their dinner was ended; and the three ladies were sitting in full talk together, during the easy hour which always preceded the solemn business of the evening toilet, when the drawing-room door was thrown open, and “Mr. Vincent” announced.

The party with which he had been associated

when last they had met, was still, notwithstanding all that had passed since, too interesting for either of the young ladies to behold him without a visible start, and a change of complexion which shewed plainly enough that Baden-Baden and its Balcony House were not forgotten.

Nor was Mrs. Roberts herself unmoved by the unexpected appearance of Mr. Vincent. His relationship to the young lady of whom she had just disposed in a manner so little likely to be approved by her family, did certainly for a moment or two make her feel rather uncomfortable, and she rose up, and sat down again, in a style which plainly shewed that she did not feel quite at her ease.

It was Agatha, as might, indeed, have been reasonably expected, who was the first to recover her composure sufficiently to address their visitor.

“How do, Mr. Vincent?” said she, in her latest lisp, and with her newest finish of pretty negligence. “Where are your two friends fled to? Have you actually lost them altogether?”

“No, Miss Roberts,” he replied, “they are still with me. We are all at the same hotel. They will both, I am sure, take an early opportunity

of paying their compliments to you ; but to two such ardent spirits, the first entering Rome has something so overpowering in it, that every other feeling seems suspended till the first salaams have been made to its marble magnates. Had I not been peculiarly anxious, from accidental causes, to inquire for the health and welfare of my young cousin, Miss Harrington, I too might at this moment perhaps be standing to gaze at the effects of this fine moonlight night on the Coliseum. Permit me to beg, Mrs. Roberts, that she may be told I am here."

During the whole of this speech, Mrs. Roberts had been very sensibly telling herself that it was no good to get frightened, and that there was nothing for it but to put a bold face upon the matter ; she therefore endeavoured to look exceedingly facetious as she replied, "As to sending a message to your cousin Bertha, Mr. Vincent, it is not quite so easily done as said. I wash my hands of the whole business. Those who sent her into a family where there was so captivating a man as Edward, must answer for the mischief, if mischief it is ; but the fact is, Mr. Vincent, that your cousin eloped with my son this very morning."

Mr. Vincent changed colour, but replied with a very respectable degree of composure and self-command, "I am happy, Mrs. Roberts, to have it in my power to assure you that an event which, if it *could* have taken place, you would have such serious reason to deplore, has not occurred. I have myself seen my cousin, Miss Harrington, driving very composedly about the streets of Rome this morning, but I lost sight of her carriage before I could overtake it. Pray tell me what can have suggested to you the idea of an elopement?"

"Why, where is she, sir? The thing is obvious," replied Mrs. Roberts, with rather a scornful smile. "We have seen plainly enough, all of us, how the thing was likely to end. The young lady has been passionately in love with my son for months, and I am sure I don't know how we were to prevent it. For a great while she managed to deceive us all completely, but since we have been in Rome, she has been less cautious, and it was impossible not to see what was going on."

Poor Vincent began to be dreadfully terrified. The vehemence of his cousin's love for Mr. Roberts junior did not indeed alarm him much; but the more audaciously Mrs. Roberts lied on

this point, the more strongly he suspected that some most atrocious villany had been practised against the unfortunate and unprotected Bertha. For one short moment, a feeling of indignant rage had nearly overpowered him; and had the proclaimer of Bertha's passionate love for Mr. Edward been a male instead of a female, it is probable that not all his philosophy would have sufficed to prevent his forgetting the decorum befitting a gentleman. Even as it was, however, he was instantly conscious that the species of emotion which had rushed through his whole frame while listening to Mrs. Roberts's statement, must be as useless to poor Bertha as degrading to himself; and by a strong effort he succeeded in assuming an aspect of very dignified composure as he said, "In what manner, ma'am, were you made acquainted with this elopement? It must have taken place after I saw Miss Harrington leave St. Peter's this morning."

Mrs. Roberts would have been very much less embarrassed, had the cousin of her intended daughter-in-law given way to the rage he had so powerfully struggled to subdue. She would vastly have preferred a box on the ear to the

temperate question which he had now asked. In fact, it was a question by no means easy for her to answer.

In what manner had she become acquainted with the elopement?

If her own dear girls, if even poor dear drowsy Mr. Roberts himself, had asked the same question, she would have felt a good deal at a loss how to answer it. She did not mean to tell any body that in the first instance it was she herself who had eloped with the young lady; and if she had made an exception in favour of any one, it certainly would not have been Mr. Vincent. In short, that happened to her now, which had never happened to her before. She remained silent, because she could not find a word to say.

Mr. Vincent repeated his question, and then Mrs. Roberts took out her pocket-handkerchief, and having wept behind its shelter for a minute or two, she said, "I do think, Mr. Vincent, that you are treating me in a most impertinent and extraordinary manner! What right, sir, have you to come here bullying me, because a young lady has thought proper to fall in love with my son, and run away with him? All I know is, that I have

seen a great deal going on, that I would not have suffered for a single instant in my own girls, but Irish young ladies, I suppose, are brought up differently. However, as to my knowing about it, all I know is, that the young lady went out early this morning, and is not yet returned—I know also that Edward is nowhere to be found; and what can I, or any body else think, who has seen them together as I have done, but that they have eloped?”

Mr. Vincent looked at her stedfastly for a moment, and then replied, “I, too, have seen them together, Mrs. Roberts; and I tell you plainly and sincerely, madam, that I do not believe my cousin has eloped with your son. That it may be his purpose, and yours also, that she should become his wife, is highly probable, and in this it must be my object to prevent you from succeeding.”

Mrs. Roberts now found herself precisely in the position of a sharply-hunted animal, whose only resource is to turn and stand at bay; and her spirit was not of a quality to shrink from doing so.

“What excessive nonsense you are talking, Mr. Vincent!” said she, in a tone of the very

coolest defiance. "I really had conceived a much higher idea of your understanding than it appears to deserve. I should be excessively sorry to be guilty of the very least rudeness to any one connected with our dear Bertha—who, notwithstanding this little imprudence, I shall receive with all the affection of a mother—but I really must take the freedom of telling you that I think your language exceedingly impertinent, and that the sooner you go out of my house, the better I shall be pleased."

"It may be so, madam," replied Vincent, very quietly, "but I cannot release you from the annoyance of my presence till you have been pleased to communicate all you know respecting the movements of your son."

"Indeed, sir, I must say you are very troublesome," replied Mrs. Roberts, looking very proud and very scornful. "The connexion between our families can in no degree excuse it. Agatha, my dear, though this gentleman has degraded himself by being a tutor till he has quite forgotten what good manners are, I will not, for our dear Bertha's sake, actually turn him out of doors. But really you and Maria must

immediately go and dress. The dear princess will never forgive us if we are too late; so go, dear loves, and get dressed, and I will follow the example as soon as Mr. Vincent will have the kindness to release me."

"Good gracious, mamma!" cried Maria, with much feeling, "there is nothing in the whole world that would vex me so much as our quarrelling with any of dear Bertha's relations. Why, my dear Mr. Vincent, should you think it necessary to quarrel with us because Edward and Bertha have fallen in love with each other? Is it not being very absurd?"

Vincent paused, as if considering how he should reply. He was becoming more seriously alarmed every moment; and this amiable and conciliatory speech from the fair Maria was very far from lessening this painful feeling. It shewed a sort of harmonious accord in the projects of the family, that made him feel a sensation that almost approached to terror, as he remembered how completely Bertha had been in their power. The having seen her but a few hours before, was now his best source of hope; for let them have done what they would, it was impossible she could be

at any great distance, and it was evident that his only chance of finding her lay in extracting all the information possible from those who, he doubted not, knew all the circumstances connected with her disappearance. It was, therefore, with great civility that he assured Miss Maria of his not feeling the least wish to quarrel, but that he was very desirous of learning every particular relative to the unexpected circumstance to which she alluded.

But this restraint upon his feelings availed him little. Miss Maria had not the power of affording him any information, and her mother had not the will. So far, indeed, was she from uttering any thing calculated to throw light upon the mystery, she seemed to take peculiar pleasure in exaggerating every falsehood she thought most likely to torment him. She very shrewdly suspected the real state of poor Vincent's carefully concealed feelings towards his cousin, and ceased not to reduplicate her assurances that *nothing* could have turned "poor dear Bertha" from her passionate attachment to Edward. "In fact," she said, "nothing but *that* would ever have put the notion of marrying her into dear Edward's head."

It was just as she pronounced these words, and at the very moment when the patience of Vincent was about to give way before his vehement indignation, that the door of the room was suddenly opened, and the pale face of the discomfited Edward made visible.

CHAPTER XIV.

It is by no means improbable that the sight of Mr. Vincent might have caused a retrograde movement on the part of the young adventurer, had the powerfully excited feelings of his athletic parent permitted it; but any such measure was rendered impossible by her springing towards him with outstretched arms, and seizing upon his two shoulders with a very effective gripe, as she exclaimed, "In the name of Heaven, boy, what brings you back again?"

If ever a human being did or could look like a whipped cur, the unlucky Edward Roberts certainly displayed the resemblance at that moment:

nor did the manner in which he was greeted by his devoted mother in any degree tend to lessen it. In the extremity of her astonishment and disappointment, she seemed totally to overlook the presence of the stranger, and began her agonized interrogatories very much as if they had been alone.

The poor boy literally trembled from head to foot; yet, nevertheless, he endeavoured to bully his mother, bidding her mind her own business, and not meddle with what she did not understand.

“Not understand it, you villain!” she exclaimed; “not understand it? Who should understand it,” she continued, shaking him violently, “if I don’t?”

“For Heaven’s sake, ma’am, let us be alone, if you please, before you attack my brother in this way,” said Agatha. “If their carriage has broken down, or any thing of that sort has happened, it is no good for you to fly at him about it. Come with me, Edward, and tell me where you have left your young wife, and all about it.”

This presence of mind on the part of Agatha produced an immediate and powerful effect on her

mother and brother. The former relaxed her hold, and began to laugh at her own nervous vehemence ; while the latter made a very manly struggle to overcome his dismay, and replied to his sister by saying lightly, nay, almost gaily,—“ Oh ! you need not be uneasy about Bertha, my dear Agatha, I can satisfy you about her by a single word.”

“ But you must first satisfy me, if you please,” said Vincent, seizing the youth by his arm as he was about to repass the door. “ I quit you not till you tell me where you have concealed my cousin, Miss Harrington. Speak, sir, this instant. Where is she ? ”

“ If you were to claw me ten times more like a bear than you do,” replied Edward, “ I could not content you. I’ll be d—d if I know where she is. Gone to the devil, I hope. Take your hand off, Mr. Vincent. It is cowardly to hold me because you think you are stronger than I am.”

“ Speak but as truly concerning my cousin,” returned Vincent, removing his hand, “ and you shall receive no further injury from me. Where have you taken her ? Where have you left her ? ”

"It was she who left me," returned young Roberts, knitting his brows, and trying to look fierce.

"Mr. Roberts," said Vincent, "I am willing to believe that you have only committed a folly, from which you were ready to desist as soon as you found that you had misunderstood the feelings of Miss Harrington. Tell me where she is, and I pledge my word that neither you nor your family shall ever be troubled on the subject more."

"And I would tell you, sir, as soon as look at you, if I had the means to know," replied Edward, "but as I hope to be saved, I no more know where she is than you do."

Of the truth of this assertion Vincent entertained not the slightest doubt. There are many persons who have a sort of instinct for knowing when truth is spoken to them, and he was one of them. He immediately acknowledged this conviction by saying, "I have no doubt, sir, that you are telling me the truth. Yet there must be circumstances concerning Miss Harrington's manner of leaving you, which it would be important for me to know. Do not force me to insist upon

your communicating these, but as a matter of courtesy tell me at once all you know about her."

Vincent had touched the right chord. The unlucky youth felt himself so bothered and bruised by all his recent adventures, that the civility with which Mr. Vincent now addressed him soothed him into a much more amiable tone of mind than he had been in for some days past; and he replied, courteously enough, "Upon my honour and word, Mr. Vincent, I have not the very least idea in the world where she is. It is no good going over the whole thing again from the beginning. I suppose I must have been mistaken in fancying that she liked me so much as I thought she did. Or it might be, you know, that when we were fairly off, she might have felt frightened about her father. But at any rate it is quite certain, that after we had got one stage out of Rome, she took it into her head that she had rather not go any further; but of course, you know, I was too much in love with her to turn round and drive her back again the moment she asked me, and so I told her. And then she told me that, whether I liked it or not, she *would* go back; and while we were arguing the point, which was just as we were stop-

ping to change horses, she put her head out of the carriage window and called to an old priest who was passing, and began jabbering away in Italian with him, a great deal faster than I could understand, but I found at last that she had begged him to take care of her back to Rome, and back to Rome she came ; but where he has taken her I have no more notion than you have."

Here Mr. Edward Roberts ceased, and Mr. Vincent began to ponder his words. There was a good deal of what he had uttered that he did not believe—having pretty good reason to know, for instance, that it was quite impossible the young gentleman should ever have been deceived for an instant as to the real amount of Miss Harrington's affection for him ; but he had nevertheless very perfect faith in his assurance of ignorance as to her present situation ; and though this uncertainty rendered him very wretched, he derived considerable consolation from believing that the individual to whom she had entrusted herself was respectable, both from his age and profession. Again and again he made the now docile Edward recapitulate his statement ; nor did he leave him, and his very gloomy looking mother and sisters, till he had

convinced himself that no further information could possibly be obtained from them. And then he went back to his hotel, in miserable uncertainty of what was best to be done for the recovery of the precious being, whom he now felt he ought never to have lost sight of.

Before he reached his hotel, he had made up his mind that he would set off post for the village at which young Roberts had told him they had changed horses, thinking it possible that he might there learn something of the priest who had been her companion ; but before horses could be put to Lord Lynberry's carriage, which he had no scruple of borrowing during the absence of its owner, he remembered that it was possible Bertha might have received his letter, containing his address, before her constrained departure from Rome ; and if so, he felt persuaded, as he remembered all the proofs she had so innocently and frankly given of unbounded reliance upon him, that it was to him that she would have desired her reverend protector to restore her.

If these conjectures were well founded, the leaving Rome would be leaving her ; yet the remaining there in this lingering sort of uncertainty

was more than he could bear, and after enduring a few more tormenting minutes of vacillation between the To go or not to go, he ordered the carriage to be put back, while he returned to the domicile of the Robertses, in order to ascertain, if possible, whether Bertha had received his letter or not.

He was rather startled, upon again entering their drawing-room, to perceive, that though the party which occupied it was the same which he had left there about an hour before, their condition appeared to have undergone a very violent change. In one corner of the room Miss Maria was kneeling upon the floor in an agony of tears. On the sofa Miss Agatha was lying, as if exhausted by great exertion ; while the mother and son were standing near the middle of the room, having a table between them, and with an aspect and gestures which, joined to the raised tones he had caught as he approached, left no doubt on his mind of the disagreeable fact that they were in the act of quarrelling violently.

Under less pressing circumstances, he would certainly have left the room without giving them time to perceive that he was in it ; but this was

no moment for ceremony; and hastily approaching Mrs. Roberts, without looking to the right or the left upon her disconsolate daughters, he said, "I beg your pardon, Mrs. Roberts, nor will I detain you a moment if you can answer me this one question. Did my cousin Bertha receive a letter by the post before she left Rome?"

"No—yes—I don't know," replied the unfortunate Mrs. Roberts, whose red face and distended eyes indicated too much agitation to render it worth while to question her further: but Vincent was desperate, and appeared inclined to persevere in his inquiry, when Edward, who certainly desired no witness to what was going on between himself and his family, rendered any such perseverance needless by saying, shortly and distinctly, "Yes, Mr. Vincent, she did. She had the letter in her hand all the time we were together, and I don't believe she left off reading for a moment, so I can speak to that fact with certainty."

This prompt reply produced the desired effect. Mr. Vincent paused not to give another glance at the family group, but instantly left the room, and returned to his hotel, relieved at least from the misery of not knowing what line of conduct

to decide upon. He not only decided upon remaining in Rome, but went to bed with a sort of feeling at his heart which made him very considerably less miserable than he had been before he entered the stormy drawing-room of the Robertses.

CHAPTER XV.

AND the Robertses ? How were they engaged, both before and after this visit ?

No sooner had Mr. Vincent the first time taken his departure, than Mrs. Roberts renewed the attack upon her son, which had been so skilfully stopped by Agatha when he was present.

“And now, sir,” said she, “be pleased to account to me as politely, and a little more truly than you have been doing to your friend the tutor, how you have managed to lose hold of the girl whom I placed in so masterly a manner in your hands ?”

“To answer you more truly than I did my

friend the tutor is impossible, ma'am; but by way of politeness, I can make you a bow, if you please," replied her son, drawing his heels together and making her a low bow.

"I won't bear this!" returned the irritated Mrs. Roberts, stamping her foot upon the ground. "Gracious Heaven! After all I have done, all the money I have given, all the risk I have run, am I to be told by a sneering puppy of a boy that he has let the golden prize slip through his fingers, and then returned to laugh at me? Agatha, I shall go mad! Make him tell you where the girl is. It may not yet perhaps be too late to secure her. You know not, any of you, how necessary it is that we should have and hold her and her money for ever. People can't go on playing at being lords and ladies for nothing, I can tell you. If we fail in getting this girl, the game is up with us."

"Don't go on making a fool of yourself, Edward," said his elder sister, with a good deal of severity. "This is evidently no time for jesting."

"Hold your tongue, Agatha! You are a devilish clever girl in some things, but you understand no more about the affairs of men than a baby.

As to not jesting, indeed, I am perfectly ready to obey you, being greatly more tempted to blow my brains out than to laugh."

"How can you try to frighten us by talking in such a horrid, disgusting way, Edward?" said Maria, beginning to cry, "and we kept all this time from going to dress! Do come, Agatha, will you? I have the most particular reason in the world for wishing to be in good time to-night. I don't know what may not depend upon it!"

"Maria, you are an idiot," said the young man, "and as for you, Agatha," he continued, turning to the eldest sister, "though you are not an idiot, you are an ignoramus. But my mother is neither the one nor the other, if she does not let her temper get the better of her. So now, ma'am, be so good as to hear me, if you please; and don't let us begin by quarrelling, for it won't answer, you may depend upon it. As to your young devil incarnate, Miss Bertha, I tell you fairly, that even if I knew what was become of her—which, as I hope to be saved, I do not—I never would, as long as I have breath in my body, attempt any thing more in the matrimonial way with her. You know as well as I do that I always hated her like

poison. And you ought to remember, into the bargain, that I never let this make the very least difference. But it's no good to mince the matter. The thing's no go, mother, and you may as well give it up first as last."

"But I will not give it up, sir!" screamed his strongly-excited parent. "Give it up? Gracious Heaven! Don't I know the monstrous sums I have squeezed out of your father on purpose to keep things going till I could make you set about the business in earnest! And a pretty job you have made of it at last! Oh! I shall go mad! I am quite sure I shall go mad!"

"And what do you think I shall do, ma'am?" cried Maria, wringing her hands. "The truth comes out at last. You say yourself now that you only squeezed out the money for the sake of Edward, so it is much that Agatha and I have to thank you for! And yet, cruel and unkind as you are, I have never for a moment lost sight of what you said ought to be our first object; and now, at the very moment when I am quite sure of succeeding, both as to the affections of my heart, and prudent conformity to your wishes in every respect, you stand here scolding Edward about a thing

that is past and over, instead of going to dress for the Princess Yabiolporakiosky's ball! and yet every thing depends upon my meeting him this very night!"

A sudden thought struck Mrs. Roberts as she heard these words, and for a moment a feeling of reviving hope for Maria overpowered her fears for Edward. She recollected the visit of Mr. Vincent, and the expression of her countenance changed, and her voice almost softened into a whisper, as she said, "Has Lynberry written to you, Maria? Is it Lord Lynberry whom you expect to meet to-night?"

"Lord Lynberry, ma'am!" returned Maria, with such a mixture of scorn and indignation as made her look quite sublime, "Lord Lynberry! What a pitiful, poor-spirited creature you must take me for! No, ma'am. However badly you and Edward, between you, may have managed *his* affairs, mine have fortunately been left to myself. Agatha can tell you, if she chooses to do so, what the attentions of Prince Filippo Odoronto have been; and there was that in his manner, when he engaged me for the first waltz to-night, which convinced me."

"Why, you silly fool!" said her brother, interrupting her, "Prince Filippo Odoronto is married."

"Married!" returned Maria, with a contemptuous smile, "about as much married as you are, Master Edward. Give me leave to know what concerns myself, if you please. The words which Prince Filippo said to me, as he gave me my bouquet the night before last, could not have been spoken by any married man."

Mr. Edward's reply to this was a short whistle, and then turning to his mother, he resumed what he very naturally thought a more important subject.

"I don't think you will do any good by listening to the history of Maria's loves just at this moment, ma'am; it will be more to the purpose, I believe, to tell me straightforward, without bothering the question with any ifs or buts, whether you can get my father to draw a cheque large enough to satisfy the claims of Frederigo Paulovino upon me?"

"No!" was the succinct reply of his mother.

"Then I advise you not to shew yourselves in any drawing-room in Rome, either to-night or any other night. I know you will get affronted if you do."

"If your conduct has really been such as to

bring such a consequence upon us, Edward," said Agatha, colouring to the temples, "you deserve—" but there she stopped.

"You are quite at liberty to go on, Miss Agatha," he replied. "I believe that when the cards turn against a man, his friends and relations generally turn after them; but that is a point of no consequence whatever. If this money can be paid, I am ready and willing to start afresh, and hope for better luck for the future; but if it cannot, the game is up with us all. You had better take my word for it, than wait till you have found it out for yourselves."

"You are talking the most outrageous nonsense possible, Edward!" cried Agatha, vehemently. "What on earth can it signify, as far as the manner of our being received in society is concerned, whether you lose or win?"

"As far as winning and receiving a handful of naps one night, Miss Agatha, or losing and *paying* them another, you are perfectly right in supposing that you could not by possibility have any thing whatever to do with it. But you are more behind-hand in your education than I should have thought possible, if you don't know that a fellow

who pockets his winnings, and shirks paying his losings, is liable at any hour of the day or night to be kicked about like a dog; and that the loveliest women that ever trod the earth, if they are related to him, can no more hope to be well received by people of fashion, than if they were known to be infected with the plague."

"Then how have you dared, young villain as you are, to betray us into so dreadful a situation?" returned Agatha with vehemence. "You are, if this be true, a reptile unfit to live! knowing, as you so evidently did, that you were risking our destruction, yet persisting in your villanous course just because it amused you! Edward, you are a monster!"

"You may call me what names you like, my pretty young lady, and I will be generous enough not to call names in return, although — However, that is no matter. I will just observe, however, that you are quite mistaken in supposing that I ever risked a farthing for the sake of amusing myself. It has, I assure you, been quite a matter of business throughout. I wanted money, and I had no other means of getting it. What the devil was I to do? You would not

have had me go begging, I suppose? Besides, I have another excuse, if any excuse were wanted for a young fellow who has done nothing worse than all men of real fashion do every day of their lives. I had every reason to hope, that if luck ran against me, I should be able to make Sir Christopher Harrington pay the damages."

"Well, sir, and so you might," cried his mother, vehemently. "Did I not place her —" but suddenly recollecting that the "*dear chucks*," her daughters, were to be innocent of her part of the elopement, she checked herself, and then added—"upon all occasions as much within your reach as possible?"

"Yes, ma'am, I can't deny that you did your part of the business admirably, excepting that you did not give me quite money enough for the job. I might have been married to the little devil by this time, in some way or other, if I could but have afforded to take a courier."

"Do you mean to stand talking here all night?" cried Maria, clasping her hands imploringly. "I tell you all, and I tell you no more than the truth, that every thing depends upon my going to the princess's ball to-night."

“And I tell you,” replied her brother, “that as far as your affairs are concerned you had much better stay at home. Filippo Odoronto is married, I tell you.”

“And how do you know, you vile gambler, you, that he may not get a divorce?” replied the enraged Maria. “Or how do you know, you wicked, selfish wretch!” she added, “how do you know that I might not meet Lord Lynberry there to-night, and set every thing right again in that quarter? Oh! it is too, too hard!”

It seemed as if there were something in these last words of her daughter Maria which particularly irritated the unfortunate Mrs. Roberts. Perhaps she felt that there was a species of vagueness in the nature of that pretty young lady's hopes, which partook a great deal of the character of despair. Whatever the cause might be, however, she seemed at this moment to lose her patience altogether, and stepping forwards with rapid strides to the table at which Edward was standing, she said, with a raised arm and thundering voice,

“I'll make an end of it at once, children, for I am tired of it all. I have toiled and slaved

like a negro to do the best I could for you all, but it is all in vain. You are a parcel of selfish, headstrong, extravagant fools; and I don't believe that if you had a dozen such mothers as I am, with all my good management, knowledge of the world, and unwearied industry, it would be enough to save you from destruction. But I shall go on no longer in this way, I promise you. I shall go directly to your father, and tell him the exact state of the case. I have done all that a devoted mother could do, and I will strive and strain no more. I declare to Heaven, that, since I have been in Rome, I have never paid a single farthing for any thing that I could get on credit, in order that you might be able to enjoy yourselves; and the consequence is, that what with one thing and another, there is a good deal more owing here than we ought to spend in the course of a whole year. There is but one thing to be done, that is as clear as light. Don't you understand what I mean, Agatha?"

"I neither know nor care what you mean, ma'am," replied her fair counsellor. "You must know as well as I do that no maudlin half measures ever can answer. I have told you so a

thousand times over. I know, from the very best authority, that more than half of the peculiarly elegant and fashionable-looking English who take the lead in all the first circles on the continent, are completely ruined, in the vulgar, old-fashioned sense of the words. But where there is beauty in the young, and common sense in the old, such people may, and do, go on for years enjoying every pleasure that life can bestow, and without being one atom worse off at last than we seem to be now. But then, of course, they are not disgraced by having a swindling blackleg belonging to them! Edward ought to leave us instantly, and go to New Zealand or Australia, or something of that sort, and we ought to go on immediately to Naples."

"But not till we have been to one more ball," cried Maria, suddenly dropping upon her knees, "oh, let me try what I can do at one more ball, if you have any pity!"

Mrs. Roberts was in the act of making rather a spirited answer to this appeal, when Mr. Vincent entered the room in the manner described in the last chapter.

CHAPTER XVI.

ONCE more left to themselves, the unfortunate family appeared to have gained time for reflection from the interruption; for the mutual reproaches seemed to have ceased, and for a few moments after the door had closed upon the intruder, they all remained profoundly silent.

The first sound heard, was a deep sigh from the bosom of the fair Maria; but now, this sign of woe, instead of being noticed with severity, produced only a responding sigh from her mother, together with the gentle words, "Don't go on fretting so, Maria, that can't do any good to any body."

"You never said a truer word than that, Mrs. Roberts," said the son, evidently relieved by the comparative calm in which he found himself, "and if you could teach the girls to be as reasonable as yourself, I would answer for it that I would shew you a way in no time to creep out of this confounded hole that we have got into."

"Well, speak, Edward," replied his mother, meekly, "I am so sick of plotting and planning for every body, and never finding any single thing answer, that I am ready and willing to listen."

"Well, then, you have spoke out about *your* money matters, so it is but fair that I should speak out about *mine*. There is scarcely a shop in Rome where a man of fashion could get an article of any sort to please him, where I have not got a bill. Sometimes I went in with one first-rate fellow, and sometimes with another, and more than once I have asked some of your fine-lady friends to set me down at the shops where there was something I wanted; and in this way I have got credit to a larger amount than it is any use to talk about; for if the game is up, it matters little whether it is fifty or fifty thousand that our creditors are to whistle for. Well then, it is as clear

as daylight that there is but one thing to do, and that is to flit. We shall not be the first family who have performed that admirable piece, 'We fly by night,' in concert. The carriage will be here presently to take us to this ball that Maria is making such a riot about; and if you will take my advice, you will bundle us all into it and be off. The money that you gave me for the purpose of obtaining the possessions of Miss Bertha, will help to take us. We must go to that place by the sea—Civita something or other—and stick to the steam-boats as long as possible; and then get on as cheap as we can to Ostend, or Havre, or Calais, or some of those places where people live upon nothing, they say, and if they have a mind for it can make a splash in a quiet way."

"And why not live upon nothing here, Edward?" said Agatha, rising from the sofa. "I have been told over and over again that it is the very easiest thing in the world, nor have I any doubt that we should find it so. Here we are precisely in the situation that suits us; the people, the manners, the perfect liberality of feeling on all points. In short, we wish—I mean Maria and myself—we wish to stay here; and that

being the case, I can see no reasonable cause for our going. I do not wish to say any thing severe to you—quite the contrary: I have a great regard for you; and it is exactly for that reason that I so strongly advise your immediately setting off for Australia.”

All this was spoken without any appearance of violence or ill-humour, and as far as tone went, had every appearance of being a very reasonable remonstrance. Edward appeared to think it so, for he replied to it in the same temperate and reflective manner.

“I am fully aware of all the advantages you allude to, Agatha,” he said, “and value them as much as you do. When I was at school I used to hear a great deal about the glories of Rome, and I am now ready to give my testimony to its being the most glorious place upon earth for people of fashion like ourselves, who have a proper value for princes and princesses, and all that sort of thing. But let people say what they will, Agatha, about living here for *nothing*, that phrase, I do assure you, does not refer the least in the world to debts of honour. As to tradesmen, the letting their bills rest in peace as long as you

possibly can, is, of course, all plain sailing and fair play; and those who best understand the keeping up their credit by shewing themselves off side by side with those who throw about their tin freely, can carry on the war the longest. But liberal as you truly say Rome is, I happen to know, my dear, that the women and the men hang together like bees when the question is about cutting a fellow that can't pay his play-debts. Take my word for it, that my setting off for Australia won't rub out the blot, and that if you persist in staying here, you and Maria will find yourselves walking *tête-à-tête* on the shady side of the hedge."

Agatha listened to him in gloomy silence. Though not quite so well informed upon the subject as himself, she greatly feared that his statement respecting this one exception in the liberal code of Rome was only too correct; and her "fine spirit" was so completely overwhelmed by the idea that she was about to be dragged away, and actually forced to turn her back upon all the thrones, principalities, and powers, which she so fondly loved and so devoutly revered, that she sank back upon the sofa in an agony of tears.

At that moment a heavy cloud did indeed seem to settle itself upon the Roberts race, for not one of them appeared to have sufficient vigour left to make a noise.

Mr. Roberts senior was pretty nearly fast asleep in his own little room, with his empty brandy-and-water glass standing on the table before him.

His wife stood exactly where Vincent's last entrance and exit had found and left her. Her hands were firmly clasped together, her brows knit, and her eyes fixed upon the ground.

Their son remained opposite to her, and having ceased to speak, he had crossed his arms upon his chest, and stood, if not exactly "at ease," yet affecting to look so as well as he could, while he waited with a sort of dogged patience for what was to be said or done next.

Maria was still on her knees, but her head and arms were now supported on a chair; and from it proceeded a low and very dismal sobbing, which several gentlemen, if they had heard and understood it, ought to have thought exceedingly flattering.

This gloomy state of things lasted for several minutes, but was at last interrupted by Agatha,

who suddenly rousing herself, exclaimed, "Tell me at once, both of you—you, ma'am, and Edward, I mean—what is the sum that would bring us clear at once from all debts, gambling, tradesmen, and all?"

The abrupt manner of this appeal startled the whole party, and the two she had particularly addressed seemed to rouse themselves in order to give her an answer.

But there was apparently something either difficult or disagreeable in doing so, for they both hesitated.

"What is the good," said Edward, "of tormenting one's memory about every nap that may be owing up and down this confounded place? You will be asking us next, I suppose, how much we left unpaid at Paris. What is the good of it, Agatha?"

"No good in the world," replied her mother for her. "Upon that point I certainly know better than any of you, for I have not forgotten the last scene I had when I got your father to draw for the money for Edward's running off with Bertha."

"My father did not then know how desperate our condition was," replied Agatha, with a little of

her former stately decision of manner. "Let him now be told the whole truth, without any mitigation or disguise whatever. Let him be made to understand that we must all run away in the middle of the night, and never be able to lift up our heads afterwards, if he does not at once sell out of the funds, or draw out of the bank, whichever it may be, as many thousands as will be necessary to get us all perfectly clear. When this is done, we shall be able to look about us; and I have no doubt in the world that we shall then be able to go out again as well, or rather, I ought to say, a great deal better than ever. Will you undertake to manage this, ma'am?"

"No, Agatha, I will not," replied Mrs. Roberts, in a manner so decided as to leave no hope of shaking her resolution. "I know the state of your father's mind better than you do, and I positively refuse to make any such proposal to him."

"Then if you won't, I will," said the young lady, springing to her feet with a degree of vivacity which showed that her confidence in her own powers was reviving. "If," she added, "if you would let me know the amount required, it would be more convenient, and so you will both find, if

I happen to bring you rather less than you want."

"Less than two thousand pounds would not be worth having, for my share of the business," cried Edward, boldly, as he saw her moving towards the door.

"Very well," replied his sister, composedly, "that shall be the sum I will ask for; but it might be better for me to state how much of this is for debts of honour, and how much for tradespeople.

"One fourth of the sum," said he, "would let me clear of the world, if my losses were paid."

"And for you, ma'am," resumed Agatha, "I presume that about two or three hundred would suffice?"

"Mercy on me! No, indeed it would not, Agatha!" exclaimed Mrs. Roberts, suddenly recovering herself, as it seemed, from the astonishment which had kept her silent. "Not a farthing less than seven or eight hundred would do me any good, if you mean for a regular paying up of everything. Remember, there are no less than four milliners that we have all had dresses from. I have not paid one sixpence of rent yet. There

is a horrid long bill at the *restaurant*, and I have got the coachman and the footman to wait, on condition that I should pay them almost double when we go. Then of course, you all know, there are millions of bills for gloves, shoes, hair-dressing, flowers, brandy, tea, coffee, wine, sugar, candles, wood, perfumery, milk, washing, silk stockings, shawls, bonnets, cloaks, turbans for me, scarfs and fans for us all, and a hundred and fifty other things that it is quite impossible I should remember all in a moment. But if you are really in earnest, Agatha, in trying what you can do by way of getting a tolerably large sum at once, it will be best to put ours at one thousand; for a hundred or two can make no real difference at such a time, and this would leave us a little mite of ready money, which would be a real blessing to us all."

"Very well, ma'am," said the self-elected nuncio, composedly. "I will take your estimate at one thousand, and Edward's at two and trust I may be able to succeed for both."

"If you do," cried Mrs. Roberts, lifting up her hands and eyes, "I shall be ready to declare that you are the most wonderful creature that ever

lived. Away with you, Agatha! We shall neither of us be able to breathe, I think, till you come back again!"

"But Agatha! Agatha!" cried Maria, raising her head from the chair, "do you hope to manage so as for us to go to the ball to-night?"

"If I succeed at all, Maria, you may go where you will, not only to-night, but for a pretty tolerably long number of nights afterwards. I do not intend to do the thing by halves, I promise you."

Having said this, the young lady walked with a stately and assured step towards the door, but was stopped on the threshold by her mother's calling to her.

"Stay one moment, Agatha," she said. "Remember, my dear, that your poor papa thinks that Edward and Bertha are run off together, for I told him so. You will have to begin by setting him right about that."

"Very well, ma'am," again responded Miss Agatha, "that will be but a trifle among all the rest of it." And having so said with rather a sardonic sort of smile, she bowed her head and left the room.

CHAPTER XVII.

MISS AGATHA, as she expected, found her father dozing in happy ignorance of the important crisis at which the affairs of his family had arrived. And also, as she expected, he looked at her with an air of very great astonishment, when, having roused him from his slumbers, she informed him that she had something important to communicate to him.

“ You, my dear ? ” he replied, with a very kind paternal smile. “ Then I guess it must be something very agreeable, Agatha. For of late, Heaven help me ! I have never had any thing important said to me that was not disagreeable ; but it

was always your poor dear mother that said it. But now I hope the good news is really beginning, for even *she* told me something this morning that I was by no means sorry to hear, about your brother Edward. And now, as I take it, Agatha, you are come to tell me something either about Maria or yourself—which is it, my dear ?”

“The news I have to tell you, sir, is of a very different kind,” replied Agatha, solemnly ; “and is, I am sorry to say, of a nature as far as possible from being agreeable. In the first place, sir, it is absolutely necessary that I should confess to you, that I am convinced we have all been mistaken in supposing my poor mother was a good manager. I have now discovered facts which convince me of the contrary ; and it is this which has determined me to come to you, in order to explain fully the situation of your affairs, of which I am quite convinced you are almost entirely ignorant.”

“God bless my soul, my dear child, you don’t say so !” said the old gentleman, looking rather better pleased and rather less astonished than might have been expected. “Well, to be sure ! who would have thought it. And yet, Agatha, I

won't deny, my dear, that I have sometimes had a little misgiving about her being so very clever as to money matters as she always said she was. However, Agatha, if she deceived herself in this, it was only a mistake, you know, and not her fault. Poor dear Sarah! only to think of my notions proving right after all! But at any rate, my dear, it is a comfort that your brother has made such a great match. It is a blessing that he is provided for, because I can do the more for you and Maria."

"There again, sir, my mother has made some most extraordinary blunder. Edward is now in the house, having come back from his ridiculous expedition with the news that Miss Harrington had run away from him with a priest."

"This is the worst news of all," said the poor old man, looking a good deal more rational and a good deal more miserable than when the conversation began. "We have then lost Miss Harrington as a boarder, and Edward has not got her as a wife?"

"Exactly so," replied Agatha. "And now, sir, do you think you are sufficiently composed to hear and understand the statement I am come

to make of the real condition of your family affairs?"

By *composed*, Agatha probably meant *sober*, and she immediately perceived that when her father quietly answered *yes*, he spoke the truth.

The species of imbecility into which he had been for some time sinking, had a considerable mixture of wilfulness in it. He had found himself so miserable, poor man! in watching the waning state of his affairs, that he sought relief in ceasing to watch them any longer, and his brandy-and-water system was, to a great degree, a matter of calculation. He did not wish to lose his senses every day from intoxication, but he did wish to become indifferent and forgetful. The *tête-à-tête* interviews with his wife, which invariably ended by his being obliged to draw for more money, had long become the bane of his existence; and he now felt the interference of his daughter as a relief, and if it was necessary that he should hear of more troubles, he greatly preferred listening to them from a new quarter.

Taking advantage, therefore, of the readiness with which he seemed disposed to listen to her, Agatha related to him the whole of her brother's

adventures, including his unfortunate attempt at elopement, his heavy losses at the gaming-table, and his numerous debts to tradesmen.

She then went on to state, without any attempt at disguise or mitigation, the condition of the family credit; and concluded by asking him whether he did not think that the best thing he could do under the circumstances would be to redeem the whole family from utter disgrace by at once liquidating all claims upon them. This done, she said, he might save them all from future risk of similar embarrassments, by letting her take the management of every thing relating to money.

“Try this scheme, my dear father,” she said, in conclusion, “and you will find that you are not ruined yet.”

There was something so new in being thus talked to by his daughter, who had never before addressed so many words to him on any subject, that he listened to her with the deepest attention; and when she had concluded, he got up, kissed her on the forehead, told her that he was very much obliged to her, and that he should take into consideration every word she had said.

This general assurance, however, was not enough to satisfy the anxious mind of Miss Agatha, and she confessed that she was determined not to leave him till he had told her whether it was his intention that all his family should be disgraced or not.

“Agatha,” replied the old gentleman, with more firmness of voice and manner than she expected from him, “it is decidedly my intention that they should not.”

This was enough. His daughter took a most affectionate leave of him, begged him to go to bed and compose himself, and promised that a list of all their debts should be furnished to him in the course of the following day.

She then returned very triumphantly to the anxious party she had left in the drawing-room, when it was quickly decided that the ladies should immediately dress for the ball. Mr. Edward, however, declined accompanying them, confessing that he should have more pleasure in meeting his particular friends after his accounts with them were settled, than before.

* * * *

Having thus relieved the most important personages of my narrative from the terror of losing

what they considered as a very *important* ball, I may with a safe conscience bestow a few moments upon poor little Bertha Harrington, who, though by no means a prodigy of youthful wisdom, was not without some sterling good qualities.

It is not necessary to relate all the particulars of her escape with the worthy curé at full length. It must suffice to say, that under his protection she not only reached the convent of the Santa Consolazione in safety, but was fortunate enough immediately to obtain a hearing from Father Maurice, who undertook to take charge of her till he could place her under the protection of the relation she had named.

A mild-looking old man was commissioned to find her a bed, and supply all her wants, and from him she learned that the guilty but penitent Mademoiselle Labarre survived the interview she had had with her but a few hours.

When the venerable Father Maurice came to her on the following morning, desiring to know in what manner he could serve her, Bertha certainly startled him a little by giving him to understand that all she wished or wanted was to be conveyed immediately to the most fashionable hotel in Rome,

for the purpose of putting herself under the protection of a gentleman who was her cousin.

During the interval of a few moments, the good priest sat with his eyes fixed on the floor, and his chin supported in his hand, pondering on what it would be most righteous to do under the circumstances; and, fortunately for Bertha, he decided upon letting her have her way.

As to pausing to describe the feelings of Vincent as he saw her ushered into the sitting-room which he occupied with his young pupil (who was, however, fortunately absent), it is quite out of the question. I can only say that Father Maurice having been dismissed with grateful thanks by both, and such a donation for the use of the poor as convinced him that they must be very excellent young people, these strangely situated and hitherto unacknowledged lovers, came to an explanation which made them rather happier than they seemed to think they ought to be under such very embarrassing circumstances.

Vincent, in truth, felt that the delicate forbearance which had hitherto prevented the avowal of his affection, had already plunged the object of it into dangers and difficulties from which he might

have saved her; and with such a conviction on his mind, it was not very likely he should persevere in a line of conduct which was still likely to prove as dangerous as it was painful. In short, before their interview ended, by Bertha being put in the quietest room that could be found for her use, it was decided between them that by far the most discreet, and in every way the most proper thing they could do, would be to adopt the scheme attempted by Mr. Edward Roberts—in plain English, to run away together to Naples, which Vincent believed to be the nearest place at which they could be married. And I too am clearly of opinion that it *was* by far the best thing they could do.

Nor had they ever cause to doubt the wisdom of the measure. Their journey to Castle Harrington after their marriage was as rapid as it could be without inconvenience; and Bertha found her father too ready to confess his own faults, and too happy at finding that the still worse suspicions which attached to him were removed from the mind of his daughter for ever, to be at all disposed to quarrel with the means which restored her to him.

He received Vincent too as he deserved to be received—which is equivalent to saying, that he could not be received better ; and as the repentant baronet never married again, he grew more firmly attached, with every passing year, to the man who not only made his daughter the happiest woman in the world, but who, in succeeding to his title and estates, transmitted them to his almost worshipped grandson.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CONCLUSION.

It was very evident to Mrs. Roberts, that whatever might have been the nature of the conversation between her husband and their eldest daughter, the former had been apparently made a new being by it.

The accounts of every kind, including those of his dashing son, were furnished him according to the promise of Agatha; and greatly to the delight, and not a little to the surprise of Mrs. Roberts and her offspring, the old gentleman drew, and himself negociated, a draft upon his London bankers, which exceeded by exactly two hundred pounds the whole amount—exclusive, however, of the young gentleman's debts of honour.

With his own hand he paid every bill, and into his own pocket-book he put every receipt; and then he gave notice that he wished to say a few words to all his family together.

These words were really very few, considering the importance of them, and they were to this effect:—

In the first place he addressed his son, and told him, with a sort of quiet steadfastness that carried conviction with it, that he never would pay a single shilling towards liquidating his debts of honour.

The young man's only remonstrance was uttered in these words—"Then, sir, neither I nor any of my family can ever show ourselves in society again."

To which his father replied, "So much the better, Edward. However, as far as the society of Rome is concerned, it matters very little, one way or the other, for I do not purpose remaining here more than four-and-twenty hours longer. God forgive me for all the weakness I have shewn! I will do the best I can now to remedy the mischief. I have eaten into my little fortune to the amount of four thousand five hundred

pounds; and that is not the worst of it. My late partner tells me, in his last letter, that my repeated drafts upon the capital left in the business, and for which they stipulated to give me four per cent. interest, have led them to think that it will be better to pay off the loan; so that for the future I shall only get about three per cent. interest in the funds. My income, therefore, will be but a small one; but such as it is, it will for the future be spent in England."

Had Mr. Roberts said that he "hoped" it would be spent in England, or that he should "wish it might be spent in England," or had he used any phrase whatever which left an opening for an *if*, he would probably have failed in his purpose altogether, for he would have been assailed on all sides with such torrents of argument to prove that he was wrong, as must in all probability have overwhelmed him; but his absolute style of pronouncing the words "*it will*," settled the business at once, and before eight-and-forty hours had passed over their heads, from the time that Miss Agatha undertook the affair, the Roberts family were packed into a veterino carriage as snugly and as helplessly as so many cats

in a basket, and pursuing the road to Civita Vecchai, from whence they immediately proceeded by water to Marseilles, and so on through France to England.

It was not without a strong exertion of firmness and resolution that poor Mr. Roberts achieved all this. His brandy-and-water was given up, and all his former habits of deference for his clever wife entirely broken through; so that by the time he had settled his family in a small lodging in London, he fell sick, and very soon after his indignant wife thought he was ill enough to justify her sending for a doctor, he died.

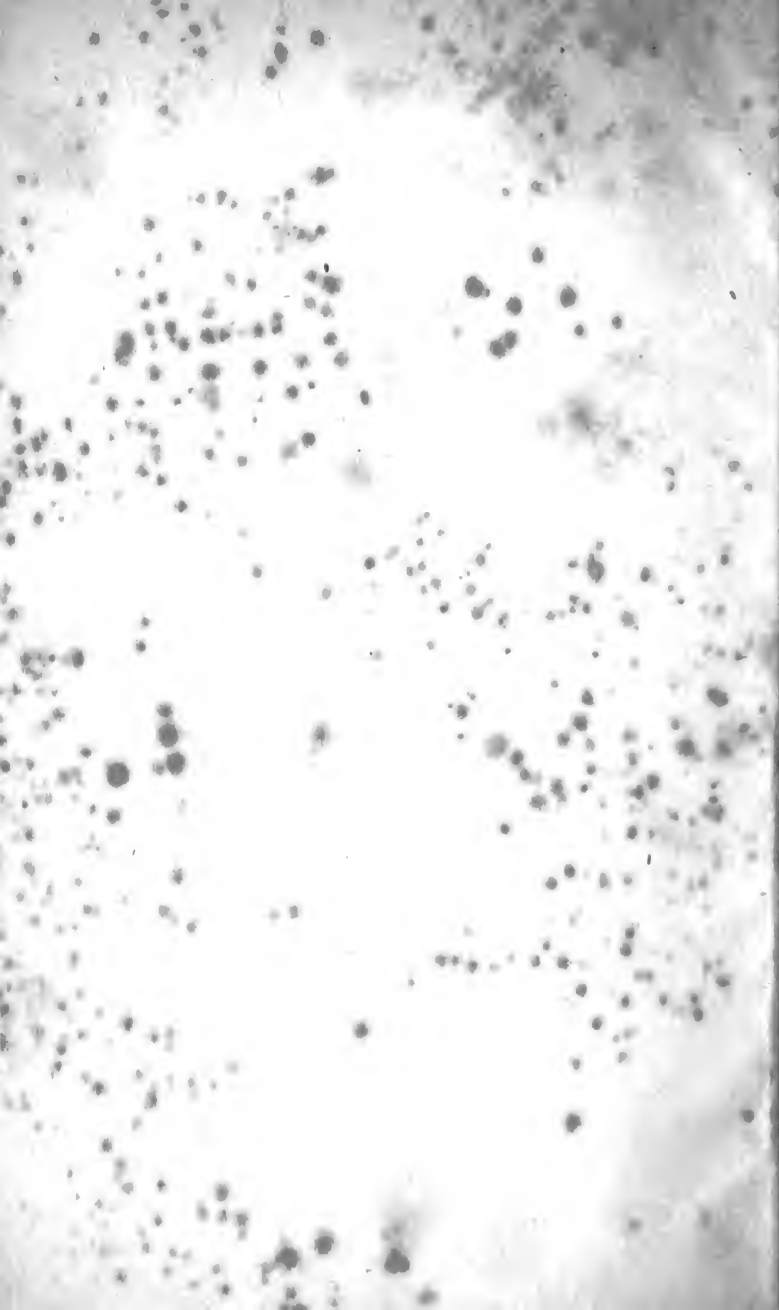
This event, however, did not find him wholly unprepared. He had prayed very earnestly to be forgiven for the weakness which had occasioned so much mischief, and he had made his will.

Almost immediately after his death, Mr. Edward "took his proportion like the prodigious son," and set off, in the hope of increasing it, to the United States of America.

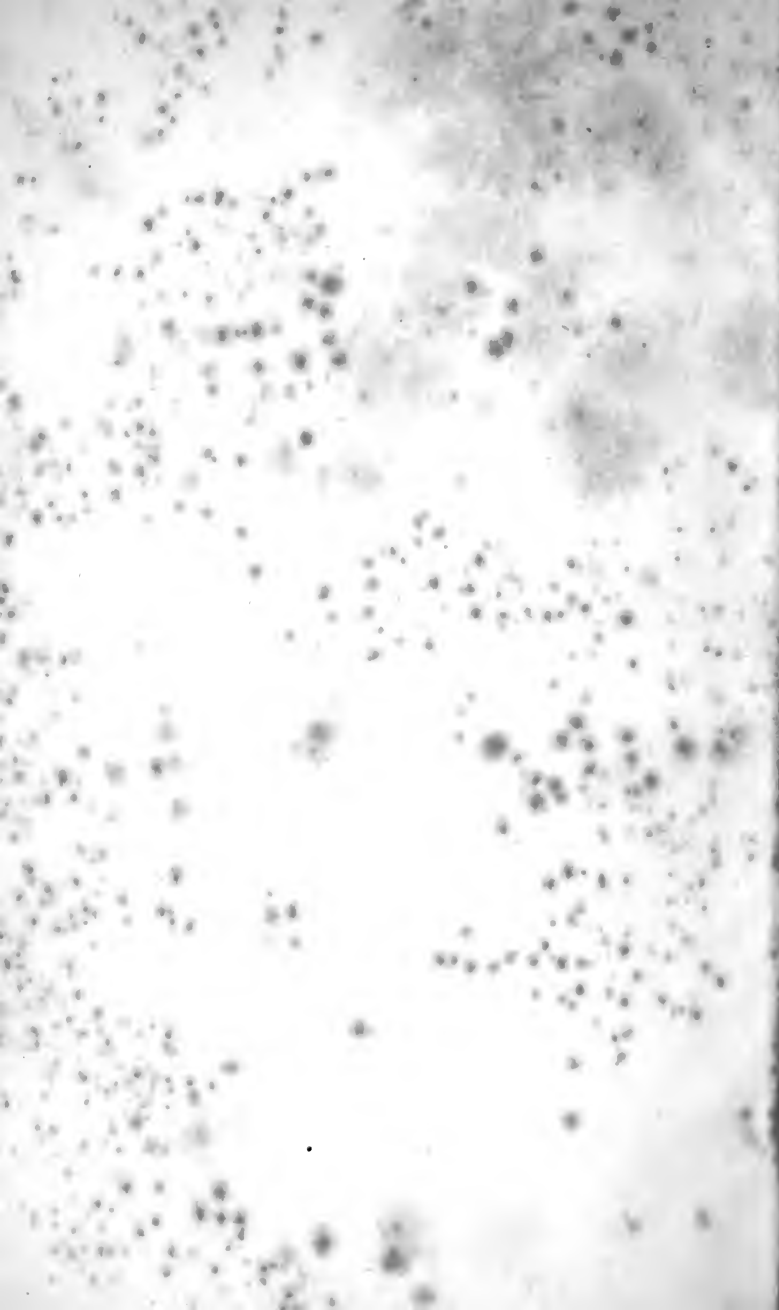
And now any one who may think it worth their while to ascertain the subsequent adventures of the ladies of the family, will be sure to hear of them either at Cheltenham, Brighton, or Lea-

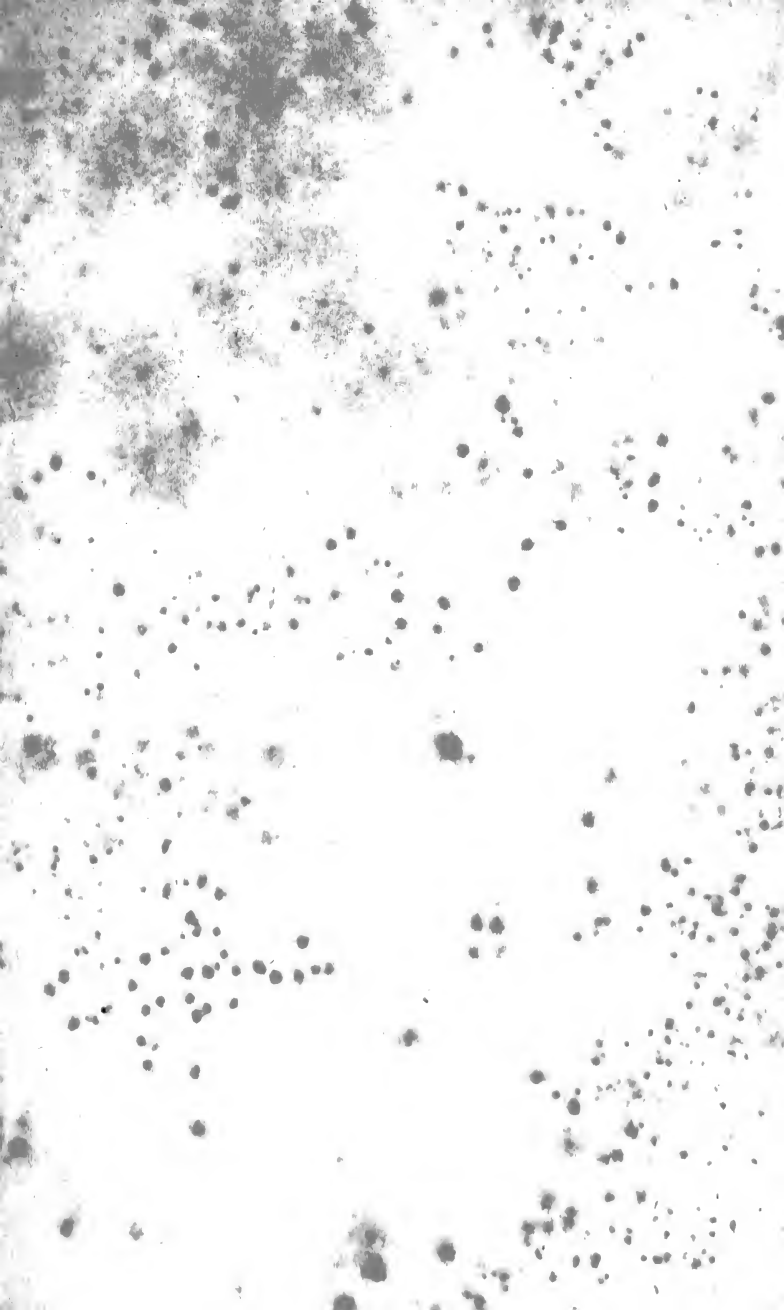
mington, as they constantly move about from one to the other of these gay resorts, amusing every one whom they can get to listen to them with the brilliant history of the delightful year they spent abroad. Their three little incomes joined together, enable them (to use their own phrase) "to keep up an appearance," but unfortunately neither of the young ladies seem likely to marry; and as the necessity of fine dresses, in all the various branches of the Roberts family, increases with increasing years, they all find themselves occasionally obliged to take up a little principal money, and hitherto the great facility which attends the disposing of funded property in England has prevented their ever having been arrested for debt.

END OF VOL. III.









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